

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER X.

DOUBTS AND MYSTERY.

MRS. MAYNE sat at the Abbey breakfast-table, pouring out the coffee as usual and handing the cups around. Her fainting-fit of the previous evening did not appear to have affected her. Mr. Mayne had unhesitatingly accepted Mary Dixon's assertion of its cause—over-fatigue from walking too much after dinner. Godfrey doubted. To him the cause had looked more like a spasm of sudden terror. Circumstances were rendering Godfrey Mayne what he had never been in his life—suspicious and watchful. The topic of conversation at the moment had been gambling, and then his father had spoken of Sir William Hunt: and Godfrey naturally asked himself whether either the topic or the name had brought terror to his step-mother; and, if so, why.

Turning to his father now, he enquired whether it was true that Sir William Hunt had returned.

"Yes," replied Mr. Mayne. "Wilding told me so last night."

"Who is Sir William Hunt, mamma?" asked Mary in a low tone.

"I do not know, dear; I don't think I have seen him," answered Mrs. Mayne, quietly. But Godfrey wished he could see her hands, whose tell-tale restlessness always betrayed when she was at all agitated.

"You will see him soon," said Mr. Mayne to his wife. "He always comes over here the first thing, without waiting for the ceremony of my calling first on him. We are very old friends, Laura. And he will come all the quicker, now that the Abbey has ladies in it."

Mrs. Mayne glanced hurriedly at her daughter; but the latter was helping herself to another egg, and did not appear to notice. At that moment Mary caught Godfrey's eye: he concluded that she thought she was being watched.

"Where does this Sir William Hunt live, sir, and why is it that we

have not heard anything of him before?" she enquired of Mr. Mayne in a pretty, saucy manner.

"Because, Miss Inquisitive, he has been away; as he generally is. He has a place on the other side of Cheston—Goule Park. He never stays there long now, and will be off again soon, no doubt."

"Dear me!" cried Mary. "Does he not like his neighbours?"

"Sir William's neighbours have nothing to do with it, young lady. He has a little frivolous wife—as frivolous as you are—who won't let him rest there. She hates Goule Park; calls it the family vault. She used to love it just as much as she dislikes it now; but since a dreadful event happened, the news of which was brought to her there ——"

"And where do they live when they are not at Goule?" interrupted Mary. "I think she is quite right not to let her husband stay there if she doesn't like the place herself."

"Quite right to drag her husband away from it as soon as he is peacefully settled down there! Oh, Mary, a fine wife you'll make! Don't you come to me for a character."

"Of course not, sir. I shall apply to—to Dick. Where do they live, though, when they are not at Goule Park?"

"Chiefly in Scotland. Sir William has a fine old place there."

But to Godfrey, her unusual animation seemed rather forced: he was not sure, though, whether this was fact or fancy.

In the course of the morning, Ernest Underwood came in, attired in the fashion as usual. He invited Mary to a drive in his dog-cart.

"You know you enjoyed that drive when I brought you home, Miss Dixon," urged the young man; "and you know how carefully I drive."

"Oh yes; and I remember finding myself suddenly jerked up a foot or so, when your horse shied at that red cart and sent the wheel on to the path," said Mary.

"But I did that on purpose. I knew you liked a little excitement. You wouldn't have me jog you quietly along as if you were—were an old lady, would you?"

"Well, you will hardly believe I can be so mean-spirited, but I do really set as high a value on my life as if I were sixty."

"No! Do you mean it?" cried Ernest, with mock seriousness. "Now, I had intended to ask leave to give you a little treat. We have just got a new pair of chestnuts, one of which has not been properly broken in. I drove them tandem into Cheston the other day, and we killed a dog, and overturned a market-stall, and frightened a flock of sheep, and backed into a shop-window—and I had to pay for a new one. Now I did mean to try to get you with me when I drive them the second time."

"Dear me! How I should have liked to go, Mr. Ernest! Only—mamma would not let me, you know."

Thus they kept on, angering Godfrey. He began to hate Ernest

and Mary too. The young man at length took his departure, saying he should call again on the morrow. Back he came in a moment.

"Miss Dixon, do come out and see my new harness, and tell me whether you think there's too much plating about it? My mother says the whole turn-out looks like an advertisement for a circus, and that people will expect me to offer them hand-bills."

So they went out laughing, and presently Godfrey followed. He found them standing by the dog-cart, talking in lower tones and a little more seriously; and he thought this mood even more unbecoming than their mirth had been. Then Ernest took a lingering farewell and drove off, repeating his promise to call on the morrow. As Miss Dixon turned back smiling, Godfrey had the pleasure of seeing that the smile suddenly left her face as her eyes fell upon him.

"Does he not look nice?" said she, aggravatingly turning again to watch the dog-cart and its owner. "He is always so neat and trim and well-dressed; he makes me feel like—like a nursery-maid watching the horse-guards."

"Do you admire that got-up look about a man—as if he were put together with glue and pins?" retorted Godfrey. "It may be all very well in town, for men who have nothing to do and no brains; and of course it is excusable in Ernest here, being no better than a boy. I think that in the country that sort of thing is ridiculous."

Miss Dixon retaliated. "I cannot see that it is less manly to ride or drive twenty miles a day in a well-fitting coat, than to lounge about with a cigar in one's mouth in ——" She stopped short. It really seemed that she had grown excited in defence of her friend, and suddenly remembered that she was going too far.

Godfrey finished the sentence for her. "In an old velvet shooting coat with a frayed-out collar? I dare say you are right. But what can you expect from a boor, Miss Dixon?"

And this was the use he made of the chance fortune had given him of a tête-à-tête with her! He had been wishing for one all night. He had meant, by dint of subtle questioning, to try to gain a clue to the aversion from card-playing shown by her and her mother, and to the agitation of the latter on hearing the name of Sir William Hunt.

Without attempting an apology, Miss Dixon passed him, to enter the house. She was met by Lydia, her mother's maid, who said that Mrs. Mayne would be glad to speak to her in her room. Godfrey, left to himself, wandered about the grounds for a little while, restless and dissatisfied: at war with Ernest Underwood, with Miss Dixon, and with himself. What was coming to him, he wondered. What could be the matter with him? With *him*, who until lately could not be roused out of his apathy!

Mrs. Mayne was seated back on the sofa in her dressing-room, agitated, nervous; her pale face bearing traces of tears. She held one hand out weakly, as one in want of help, to her daughter, when the girl came in and knelt down beside her.

"You don't come up to me, Mary! I have wanted to speak to you ever since last night. What is to be done? I am so terribly afraid of arousing suspicion in my husband!"

"Dear, kind, old Mr. Mayne! He would never suspect anyone. It is not him you need fear, mamma, but Godfrey. Godfrey's grey eyes, still though they look, see everything."

"Oh, Mary, Mary, what shall we do? Who would have thought of Sir William's living near *here*! He may call; he is sure to call; Mr. Mayne said so: and then ——"

"Now, mamma, do be calm! If you excite yourself you may become really ill. You must just lay out a plan in case Sir William does call ——"

Mrs. Mayne shuddered.

"And act up to it," continued Mary, removing the finger which her mother had placed upon her lips. "Listen. As long as the danger lasts, that is, until Sir William has left Goule Park again—and Mr. Mayne said, you know, that would be very soon—we must not sit in the drawing-room in the afternoon at the time that visitors call. If word be brought to you that Sir William has called, you must be ill—a sudden and violent headache, or something that prevents your seeing him. Oh, it will be all very easy," added the girl in a cheering tone, giving nevertheless an anxious glance at her mother.

"But we may meet him out, Mary! We are sure to come face to face with him somewhere."

"It is not at all sure. You must wear a thick veil. And Mr. Mayne was so much concerned at what we called your over-fatigue last night, that we can refuse any invitation we think dangerous on that ground. Do not despond, mamma. He will soon go away again, and all fear will be over."

"Ah, you can talk calmly and prepare calmly; you are so cold!"

"Cold!" echoed the girl, her voice rising from its low murmur for the first time. "You call me cold because you do not know what heat is. Why, my whole life is a fever—kept under most of the time; forgotten every now and then, when I am with the Thornhill children or laughing with Ernest; but always smouldering underneath, ready to burst out as soon as I am alone. I seem 'cold' because I am always at white heat; I seem 'prepared' because I can never forget. I can no longer find contentment in reading, as I used to do; if I get hold of any book exciting enough to claim my attention, I am sure to find in it, sooner or later, some reference to my own secret, or some foreshadowing of my own fate. And then I keep my eyes on the page, without being able to read further, but afraid lest if I raised them they should meet those of some other person who had come softly into the room and who would see my face change."

Mary Dixon paused. It had been a strange irrepressible outbreak.

Mrs. Mayne tried feebly to extricate her own limp hand, which lay in her daughter's, and restlessly turned away her head, as if the slim fingers and the steady dark eyes burnt her.

"You frighten me so, Mary!" she whispered miserably. "I am more afraid of you than I am of anybody, of Sir William even——"

"Mamma!"

"I am, when you are in those fits. I never know what you will say or do. You are so—so *rebellious* in your suffering. It all comes of that. What made you sing to Godfrey Mayne last night?"

"I don't know. It was imprudent; a rash, mad impulse such as I have had to regret before, as Heaven knows, and *you* know. And I suffered for it, as I deserved. Do not reproach me, mamma; you, at least, must not."

"No, no, I did not mean to," said Mrs. Mayne hurriedly. "But—look here, Mary: are you encouraging Ernest Underwood?"

"No, no. I have told you before that I must have some relief; I can find it best in bright, high spirits such as his or the children's. He is only a boy; it is just a mild flirtation to him and nothing more, and I shall take care to keep it so. If there were to ensue a danger of his caring for me seriously, I would tell him——"

"Tell him!" shrieked Mrs. Mayne.

"Mamma, who is excited now? I would tell him enough to turn his thoughts from me: to show him that Mary Dixon is one who must stand apart, who cannot be wooed as other girls can. Any little invented tale would do; his brains are so shallow. I am not to be cruel to you, do you say? No fear: you know better than that. I will be careful with everyone, in all ways; I will, indeed. Only don't be afraid, and don't think a thunderbolt is going to fall if I laugh and talk a little with a lad who is all talk and laughter. As for my singing, I think I can get Godfrey Mayne to say nothing about that."

"Mary, don't you think you are wrong in treating Godfrey as you do? You and he have been hitherto so antagonistic to each other. Better be friendly with him. Though he seems determined, it is not difficult to lead him, if one goes to work the right way. Look how I managed his engagement to the parson's daughter. He is really a kind-hearted fellow; though he may not seem so to you from the dislike you appear to have taken to each other. I am sure you could persuade him to anything, if you chose to try."

A faint colour rose to the girl's face, pale till then. "And *you* wish me to try! I do not understand."

"No, no, don't look like that, Mary. I do not want you to make Godfrey fall in love with you. Were you thinking *that*? though there's no danger of your doing that—he is too cold. But I think you should not make an enemy of him. You are pretty and attractive: draw him to you in a sisterly way. You know it could not matter, now that he is engaged to Elspeth."

"Don't you think it might matter to her?" asked Mary, slowly.

"Certainly not. Love with these rustic youths and maidens is a pretty little milk-and-water friendship. Not at all like the dreadful thing we have known it to be, Mary," said Mrs. Mayne, in a fearful whisper. "Two people just want to be married, and they meet each other, that is all. Or else, the one wants to marry and the other is gently driven to it, as I drove Godfrey."

"Do you think it was right to do that?"

"I did it for the best. You know why I did it. And they will be very happy; they are just suited to each other: he is idle and aimless, and she would never want anything different. You must not reproach me with that, Mary."

"I am not reproaching you; I am reproaching myself for having come to Croxham at all. Why did you urge me to come?"

"Mr. Mayne would have you—and I thought you might as well come. I wanted to have you under my own eye again. Besides, where would you have made a home, now Madame de Breteuil is dead? You have been better in health and brighter since you came. And if only you can quiet Godfrey's suspicions I shall be very glad you did come; very glad indeed."

"I will try," said Mary, quietly. "For otherwise there will be danger."

That evening Godfrey appeared at dinner with diamond studs in his shirt-front, and on his father's remarking upon this effort with laughing admiration, which somehow irritated Godfrey, he said with indifference that he had mislaid his others. Whether affected by this burst of magnificence or from other causes, Miss Dixon seemed anxious to atone for her neglect of him by being very charming and by giving him at least as much attention as she gave to his father.

In the drawing-room after dinner, Mrs. Mayne suggested to her husband a game of draughts, and they sat down to it; while Mary took her work to a distant window. There was not light enough for her to do much, but her head ached and she wanted to be quiet. She had let her crewels fall into her lap, and was pressing her hands wearily to her head, when a smelling-bottle in Godfrey's hand was silently offered to her.

"Thank you," said she, with a start; and she took it and leaned back in her chair, without any more words.

"You look very tired," said Godfrey, putting his back against the window-frame.

"Yes, I am tired; I don't know why. That was what made me so cross to-day."

"Cross! I don't think Underwood found you cross."

"But you did."

"I! That is a different matter. I have not his entertaining powers, you know."

"He is a nice, bright, amusing fellow," carelessly returned Mary

"But then, of course, he is only a boy, and I have never tried him with any subject more serious than 'chaff.' I don't wonder you are amazed at my thinking so much of him, but that brightness of his is delightful when one is in an idle mood."

"You seemed to be talking seriously enough when you were standing with him by his dog-cart."

"The subject was serious enough to him—a new patent bit. I expect you would soon get to the end of his information on any subject really interesting."

"Not sooner than you would get to the end of mine," said Godfrey hastily, annoyed at the imputation of being well-informed, or learned, or anything but the dashing, devil-may-care fellow it had suddenly become, for the moment, his ambition to be—or to appear to be.

"Well, if I really wanted a serious opinion, I would rather take yours than his; on horses or anything else."

This was rather daring, perhaps, to a man who already suspected her good faith. But it was clever, for of course Godfrey was not free from the common weakness of flattering himself he knew something about horses: and he was pleased.

"A serious opinion you can get in a book, Miss Dixon. What you want in a man is an agreeable companion."

"There are different ways of being agreeable, Mr. Godfrey. Young Underwood's rattling talk and energetic manner would seem rather overpowering if I were tired, or ill, or in a thoughtful mood; I might wish he were quieter then."

"I see. Then what you want in an ideal companion is, Ernest's high spirits when you are well and happy, and my dull sulkiness when you are ill and miserable."

"Not quite that," said she, laughing. "I shouldn't talk of your dull sulkiness, for instance."

"Not to me, of course. You would say my 'refined and thoughtful manner.' And yet, I don't know; you can be outspoken sometimes. You gave it me pretty straight to-day."

"I beg your pardon. I am so sorry; I really don't know what evil spirit induced me to be so impertinent. It was an evil spirit, indeed, and not Mary Dixon at all."

"I am not sure about that. There are so many Mary Dixons. There is a Mary Dixon who is silent and pale and scarcely knows how to smile; there is one who is all brightness and laughter, and can infect a whole company with her own animation. There is one who can persuade a man against his will by her charming wiles; and there is another, a singing Mary Dixon, who is, I believe, her very soul."

"Not at all," said she, in light retort, leaving him to stroke his moustache and wish he had not been quite so fervent. "A poor creature so mortal that she cannot sing one song without exhaustion, the effects of which she feels even next day."

"Is it so?" cried he, impulsively.

"Indeed it is. I meant to ask you to be so kind as to keep my unlucky accomplishment a secret; for if it is once known that I can sing, of course I shall have to sing: and I cannot and must not. In return, I promise you I will sometimes sing to you again."

"Thank you," said he, warmly. "I never experienced so enthralling a pleasure in my life. I should never have thought a young lady could sing like that without years of special study and practice."

"Of course not. I have had the special study and the practice. I was trained for public singing, but my health gave way before I could appear."

Godfrey did not understand the tumult her words woke in him. He felt sympathy with her disappointment, pity for her delicacy; but he felt, too, a passionate impulse of gladness that was not so easy to account for. Why should it give him this acute pleasure?—what could it matter to him whether she had sung in public or not? Her thoughts appeared to have wandered away; she looked out into the night-mist over the garden and the meadow with a stern, set expression that he could not read.

"You have studied in Italy, I suppose. In Rome?" he asked at random, anxious to make her speak again and look at him.

But her face changed to sudden terror as she started and faced him again, and he knew that he had struck some painful chord. Clever though Miss Dixon was, she was too young to be a perfect mistress of the arts of concealment, and she let it be seen that a random shaft, like this, had struck home. She recovered herself at once.

"You quite startled me. I was thinking of—of the time when they used to tell me that my voice would move Europe. They tell all young singers that, I believe," she added, drily.

But Godfrey had received his check. Was she deceiving him again? The thought made him furious. He wanted to get the truth out of her, by persuasion, by soft words and tones, by satire; anyhow. But all he could do was to stand there and pull his moustache, which the ladies of the neighbourhood called golden, and his father, sandy.

Mary rose and went to the table, where the lamp was, and looked on at the draughts. Godfrey left the room and shut himself into the refectory in the worst of humours. At first he couldn't find his cigar-case, then he had mislaid his cigar-lights, and when he had found them none of them would light. He stood there box in hand, scraping with one match after another, muttering as the head blew off the first: "Hang it!" off the second: "Confound it!" and as the third match broke in his angry fingers: "Curse her!"

That calmed him. Godfrey hardly ever swore, and the strong expression which had involuntarily escaped him woke him to the consciousness that he was making a fool of himself. He quietly lit his cigar and stretched himself in the American chair to moralise.

"An unprincipled woman," thought he to himself as he glared sternly at the ceiling, "is like a plague-spot whose presence spreads contagion wherever it appears, and the remedy ought to be the same—isolation." Having thus thrown the blame of his impatience over the matches upon Miss Dixon, he continued his reflections.

"Already that silly lad Underwood is mad about her. And I declare I think about her myself twice as much as I do about Elspeth. Yes, she is poisoning all our lives; she ought to be isolated. I must try to find out what it is that is amiss in her antecedents. Her mother was frightened—for her sake, of course—at the name of old Hunt: and she herself certainly showed fear at the mention of Rome. What is it all? I'll win the girl's confidence if I can—not to injure her, simply for my own satisfaction. And there's another point: who is to know whether her true name is Dixon? I could find no trace of a doctor of that name in Norfolk. Good heavens! what an awful thing if they should both be—be—adventuresses!"

He began walking up and down the room in excitement. After three or four turns, his eyes fell on the latest additions to Miss Dixon's collection of twigs and fir-cones, oak-apples and grasses, spread carefully out, as usual, on a couple of old chests, to be trimmed and dried.

"A lot of confounded rubbish!" muttered he.

A heavy old school-room inkstand which he sometimes used caught his eye. It was placed on the top of a pile of big books, evidently to press some flowers or leaves underneath.

"My inkstand!" he gasped. "She actually has the impertinence to meddle with my things for her wretched weeds!"

He snatched off the inkstand, upsetting some ink over one of his hands, banged it down on a table near, and began wiping his fingers with his handkerchief. And then he noticed something lying among the grasses. He picked it up and examined it curiously; it was a woman's glove: the longest he had ever seen; long enough to reach to the shoulder.

"Queer-looking thing off!" thought he, forgetting his anger in his amusement. "Though it looks very well on." And he stretched it upon his own arm to see the length of it. "What will women wear next! Fancy putting a pretty arm in a leather case, like a doll. It seems absurd; one would think it must look absurd. But I like those long gloves myself; at least I like them on her. I don't say I should like them on Mrs. Thornhill, or on ——"

He stopped short, even in his thoughts. Hastily taking the glove off his arm, he put it gently down again just as it had been before.

"I must not let her see that it has been touched. If she thinks her things are disturbed here, she'll take them away, and I might lose one of my best chances of meeting her here, and—and of finding out ——"

Again he stopped; but the idea of finding out anything against her, or of there being anything to find out, seemed to turn his whole

being to sickness. He put his lips to the glove. Was he in love with this girl? "No, no," answered his better reason. But his heart? That was not quite so ready with its answer.

He went softly out of doors, past the flower-beds, on to the plantation. It was dark among the trees there, and the tears that had gathered in his eyes were unseen. Godfrey Mayne pressed his troubled forehead against a cold and unsympathetic birch-tree, whispering forth a plaintive wail, "Oh, mother, mother!"

There was no consolation there, or anywhere. She was dead; she would never help or answer him again; and he, why, he was a very great simpleton. The only consolation he had was that nobody had seen him make such an exhibition of himself or suspected his weakness and his folly.

If his doubts of her could but be set at rest! For her own sake, he wished to respect her. For all Godfrey's cynicism and his French novel reading, he had the highest veneration for women—such women as his mother had trained him for. He could not give his ardent, devoted love—as love for Mary Dixon would have to be—to one who was not pure as untrodden snow.

He was not foolish enough to imagine there was no danger to him in her society. Everything about her was attractive. Her pale, fragile look, her strangely-varying beauty, her wayward moods, her sweet dark eyes, her glorious voice and the secrecy with which she hid its possession, the very mystery which hung over her—all combined to increase her charm.

But in that mystery lay the tormenting thorn which was piercing Godfrey Mayne.

CHAPTER XI.

QUARRELLING WITH ELSPETH.

CURIOUS to say, although Godfrey Mayne had fully decided in his own mind that Miss Dixon's fascinations should never take serious hold of him, he yet found himself setting up a sort of rivalry with Ernest Underwood. Godfrey knew that he, himself, was the better-looking of the two—albeit he had never been guilty of considering his own personal attractions with much pride. Ernest had light eyelashes, a wide mouth, and a plain, unmeaning face. Godfrey's features were of the type called high-bred, his skin was clear and fair, and the colour of his hair, gold, would have certainly excited admiration had he been a girl. Ernest dressed well; he, Godfrey, generally went about in an old shooting-coat—in future he would get himself up too. He would rouse his spirit from its careless apathy, and ride and drive about, as he used to do before his mother's death took away his chief interest in life.

After breakfast, the morning following that which was spoken of in

the last chapter, Godfrey heard the voices of the Thornhill children at the door ; they had come, with their governess, to fetch Miss Dixon for a walk. He threw down the book he had taken up, told Hawkins to have his own horse (which led a lazy life of it) saddled and brought round at once, and went upstairs to attire himself with care. Then he got off as fast as he could, before his father should hear the unaccustomed stir and come out to chaff him about his new activity.

At the end of the avenue, just before he reached the high-road, he passed Miss Dixon, the governess, and the children. He thought he noticed, as he raised his hat, that Mary Dixon looked surprised ; but the astonishment of Arthur and Annette was more demonstratively expressed.

"Je ne savais pas que Godfrey pouvait monter à cheval !" cried Arthur.

"Comme son cheval est maigre !" said Annette.

These and similar comments in schoolroom French, Godfrey had the pleasure of hearing. He rode well. It was so unusual to see him on horseback, now, that his appearance excited some attention in Cheston. Mrs. Underwood met him and nodded to him ; and that afternoon, when she was calling on the Thornhills, mentioned that she had seen him.

"And he looked very well, too," said she. "But I need not tell you that, for I suppose he called here in passing. That careful get-up was not meant to be wasted on the good people of Cheston, I am sure. It was to please somebody else," she added, archly.

But Elspeth blushed deeply, without smiling or looking up, and her mother answered, coldly : "He has not been here to-day."

"Well I must say he is improving," said Mrs. Underwood. "Your influence really has done wonders for him, Elspeth ; he is getting quite dashing. Your little Elspeth"—turning to Mrs. Thornhill—"has transformed him into a smart-looking young fellow, who shows some interest in life, and whom any girl might take a fancy to."

"No, I have not done it," said Elspeth, with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks. "I don't think I have had anything to do with it. He does not come here much. He has been here but twice since he came home, and each time we have quarrelled. I will not see him if he comes to-day."

Mrs. Underwood laughed. She thought there had been some little lovers' quarrel, which, made up, would lead to greater love.

In spite of Elspeth's threat, when one of the younger ones ran in from the garden to say that Godfrey was coming across the meadow, she snatched up a book and sauntered out on the lawn : but she would not look up when he approached. He was in his brightest, most affectionate mood, and he put his arm round her and took the book away.

"This must be interesting reading," said he.

It was one of the children's lesson-books.

But Elspeth was altogether too much wounded and annoyed to laugh with a good grace and be kind to him.

"Take your hand away, please," she said; "the least touch crushes these light dresses."

He let his arm fall; but he would not retort disagreeably.

"Why, what is the matter, Elspeth? What have I done?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Then, don't you think you are treating me just a little hardly? You have not deigned to give me so much as a look yet. As for a kiss, I tremble to think of taking the liberty to ask for one."

"I dare say you can do without one."

Godfrey was beginning to get rather impatient. This was not pretty petulance at all; it was genuine sulking. "I dare say I can," was on his lips, but he was not so churlish as to say it. He bent down over her and tried to look into her cross little face, as he spoke.

"No, I can't at all. I don't know what's to happen if you will not let me kiss you in two seconds."

"You can if you like," said she uninvitingly.

And Godfrey availed himself of the ungracious permission, wondering what on earth could have made his gentle, yielding, silly little Elspeth so uncompromisingly rude and disagreeable. Her frowns made her look absolutely plain. The fact was that during those three weeks of his absence, Elspeth had been stirred up, by the unsatisfactory nature of his correspondence, and by Matilda's small sarcasms, into some show of spirit, and to think he was not as warm a lover as he ought to be. She was not old enough to know by experience the way to put right that something which was wrong, and her love for him was not strong enough for her to know it by instinct. So she threw away the opportunity his affectionate manner this afternoon gave her, and was intensely disagreeable.

Godfrey was not charmed into fresh devotion by this display of petulance, but his conscience was not quite free with regard to her; so he was forbearing, and took the kiss.

"And now it is all right again, isn't it?" he asked gently.

"No, it is not all right," she answered querulously. "How can it be all right when you only come and see me for ten minutes at a time, and spend all that in quarrelling; and then go away without even asking me to make it up?"

"Well, you know you quarrel too; I couldn't quarrel with you if you did not quarrel back: could I, my dear?"

"But you spoke yesterday as if you didn't care; and you went away as if you didn't care. You never said you were sorry at all."

"You don't know what up-hill work it is, saying you are sorry to a girl who keeps her back turned all the time, and won't even look at you," expostulated Godfrey.

If he had had more experience in love-making, or if he had been more deeply in earnest than he was, he would have known better

than to use the candid expression "uphill work" in speaking of any conversation with his lady-love. The words jarred even upon Elspeth's simple ears.

"Oh, if it is uphill work talking to me, you had better not talk," said she, turning away.

But Godfrey had seen the tears start to her eyes, and that disarmed him at once.

"Elspeth, my darling, how can you say such things! Do be a little reasonable. You know I like talking to you better than to anybody else in the world."

"Better than to Miss Dixon?" she asked, with a sudden flash of jealousy, turning upon him sharply.

Now, this was a very wicked thing to say, Godfrey thought; a thing so unreasonable, so unjust, so uncalled for! He drew his head up.

"If you are to be jealous of everyone I speak to, Elspeth, hadn't you better have nothing more to do with me?" he said stiffly.

"Miss Dixon is a guest in my father's house. I may not forget the duties of hospitality, even to oblige you."

"Yes, you can remember all your duties except your duties to me," cried the silly child, bursting into sobs. "I have a right to expect a little more attention from a man who pre—pretends he wants to—wants to marry me. You said I was to have nothing more to do with you, so here's your—ring," and she drew off the little pearl and sapphire ornament and gave it him, with a gulping sob.

But this tragic action roused all Godfrey's tenderness. He forced back the little ring on to its finger, which she vainly tried to curl up in resistance, and caressed her and kissed her back to calmness and dry eyes. Then came the inevitable explanation.

"What on earth put it into your silly—your dear little head to be jealous of Miss Dixon?"

"Oh—h, I don't know. She is so pretty; at least people seem to think so; and she dresses so well, and I know you think a great deal of that; everybody seems to be in love with her and calls her charming. So I thought—I thought, when you only came to see me so seldom, it must be Miss Dixon who kept you away. But I know that she likes Ernest Underwood better than she does you."

"Of course, of course," interrupted Godfrey, hastily and impatiently. "It is the most absurd idea possible. I give you my word she is the last person in the whole world you need be jealous of."

He said this with all the conviction of the truth he thought himself to be speaking. Elspeth began to look brighter.

"You see," said she, "Mrs. Underwood came a little while ago, and she could talk of nothing but the improvement in you." Godfrey looked at her curiously. "She said that you were riding again, and were looking so nice and so well dressed, and she thought it must be

all through my influence. But I knew it was not mine. So I began thinking whose else it could be, and I supposed it must be Miss Dixon's."

"Well, I think people must be silly," remarked Godfrey with a light laugh. "It would hardly do to ride into Cheston in an old shooting-coat, would it? But it does not matter what a man wears when he is lounging about at home."

"Well, that's true," said Elspeth. "What should we think of Ernest Underwood if he drove over in an old coat? He is always dressed well: and very nice he looks."

"Oh, you think so too, do you?" said Godfrey, with perfect good-humour.

"Why, who else thinks so?" she asked quickly.

"Miss Dixon, of course. They are great friends."

"Miss Dixon does like gentlemen to dress well, then?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said he composedly. "I know she admires Ernest's tight boots and high collars; but I don't think she has eyes for anybody else."

The beautiful indifference with which he said this was satisfactory; and Elspeth was disarmed.

"I believe it is he I can see in your garden with her now," said she, straining her eyes to distinguish the figures under the Abbey walls. "I saw his dog-cart go by a little while ago."

She and Godfrey were in the Vicarage field, from which the avenue could just be seen.

"Oh, did you?" said he, with an indifference which was not quite real: for he began to ask mentally what business Ernest had to be so much about the Abbey. But his indifference suddenly disappeared as a big lumbering barouche was heard rumbling down the avenue, and he caught glimpses of it between the trunks of the birch-trees.

"Why that is the Hunts' old carriage?" he exclaimed. "I must be off then. I know my father would like me to be at home to receive Sir William. Good bye, dear."

Giving her a hasty kiss, Godfrey made for the Abbey. He very much wanted to see the meeting between Sir William Hunt and his step-mother. Ernest Underwood and Miss Dixon were at the back of the house and could not see the approach of the carriage. They were talking and laughing together, and her face was bright and smiling. Godfrey's face darkened.

It darkened still more—with a burst of sudden, unaccountable fury as he saw Ernest bend for her to fasten a pansy in his button-hole. She was playing with this feather-headed boy, for whom she certainly could not seriously care, in the most heartless manner. How dared she do it? Armed with a sense of duty to mankind, Godfrey walked towards these two, whom he looked upon as the hawk and its prey, who were evidently having so much pleasanter a tête-à-tête than the one he himself had just enjoyed. He could hardly greet the

young fellow with civility. Ernest had been already on the point of departure, and began walking round to the front of the house where his adored dog-cart was waiting, Miss Dixon accompanying him.

"Hallo, I think I know that old caravan," said he, when he caught sight of the barouche standing at the gate. "That is celebrated in history as the largest conveyance, not an omnibus, that ever was built, Miss Dixon. If Sir William and his wife were to sit on opposite seats, they wouldn't be able to see each other."

"Sir William—who is it?" she asked quickly: and Godfrey saw her change colour.

"Sir William Hunt. Haven't you seen him yet?"

"No," faltered Mary, as she laid her hand upon her heart as if to still its pulses.

"Well, when you do, you'll like him. He is a dear old boy, and his conversation will send you to sleep quicker than anything I know. The Vicar on Sunday isn't in it with Sir William."

With this, Ernest took an effusive farewell of her, and a less prolonged one of Godfrey, and drove off.

"Will you come into the drawing-room now, and see Sir William?" asked Godfrey, watching her keenly. "Mrs. Mayne will want you with her."

"Is—is mamma there?" she questioned, turning whiter than death.

Before Godfrey could answer, the footman, William, approached, saying that his mistress wished Miss Dixon to join her in the drawing-room. She obeyed at once. Godfrey followed, wondering: Had he been suspecting a mystery where none existed? Or was he going to witness a sensational meeting?

This last supposition proved to be very far from the truth. For though Miss Dixon's sensitive cheek had not recovered its colour, she was perfectly calm and self-possessed as her mother introduced her to Lady Hunt; a pretty, artistically-preserved and vivacious little lady, who looked ten years younger than her real age of forty-four.

But Sir William Hunt was not there.

C H A P T E R X I I .

AT THE ABBEY FARM.

LADY HUNT was charmed with Miss Dixon's grace and prettiness, and bewailed to Mrs. Mayne her own fate in never having had a daughter.

"I have absolutely no companion," said she, with a little affected sigh. "Sir William really does not count at all. He is very good in moving about when I want change; but, when we are settled in any place, I have to depend upon myself, as he hates amusements. He likes the largest books he can find, and collections of curiosities, and stuffed things, like Sir Thomas in the legend; only I am worse

off than the Lady Jane, for I haven't even a cousin," she concluded, with a little laugh at her own pleasantry.

"You move about a good deal, then?" replied Mrs. Mayne.

"Yes: I need it. My spirits have been wretchedly low at times since the death of my eldest son. It was a terrible affair. I cannot bear to talk about it."

Her agitation affected sensitive Mrs. Mayne at once. "No, no; pray do not talk about it—if it distresses you so much. I am sure it must."

"It does indeed. And the worst of it is, my husband is constantly referring to it before me. It has never been cleared up, you see; and he is always hoping to do it. The two boys I have left are both away, one at Cambridge and one at Sandhurst. So that I really die of dulness at Goule."

"When did you come to it?"

"About a week ago."

"A week!" repeated Mrs. Mayne, unable to suppress her surprise: for she had thought it was only a day or two.

"Yes, but I have not been well; and my husband was not well, either—we both had bad colds. He went into Cheston most days, but did not feel up to calling anywhere."

Mrs. Mayne fell into a passing reverie. She had gone several times into Cheston herself during the past week. "You will not be staying here long?" she questioned.

"Oh no. We shall go to London for a few weeks, I expect, when we leave, and then on to Cannes for the winter. I dare not propose Italy; Sir William hates the very name," added she, lowering her voice, as if approaching a painful subject.

When she rose to leave, Godfrey attended her to the carriage. But no sooner was the drawing-room door closed behind them than she turned to him, dropping her voice to a mysterious key.

"Do you know, Mr. Godfrey, my husband thinks he has at last found a clue to trace the people who killed poor William!"

"Indeed!" replied Godfrey. "When? Where?"

"I cannot tell you that. I am not supposed to know anything about it; Sir William thinks I am not fit to be trusted with a secret, I believe. But what he doesn't choose to tell me I generally manage to find out, and I know this: that since we came here he has seen accidentally one of those persons who were mixed up in it, and who escaped; and he sat down and wrote off at once to Scotland Yard. I wish he wouldn't do these things," she continued, with a plaintive shrug of annoyance. "Waking up such terrible memories, when nothing can bring our poor boy to life again! And we shall have the house full of detectives and policemen! And, if anything comes of their search, and the people are at last caught, why there—there will be a public trial!—and oh, that would be dreadful."

"To you no doubt it would," said Godfrey, with feeling. He spoke

some words of earnest sympathy as he placed her in the carriage: and Lady Hunt drove away.

Left alone in the drawing-room, Mrs. Mayne motioned her daughter to the sofa and drew her down beside her. Her hands were trembling.

"Mary, do you know that Godfrey was watching you?" she whispered tremulously. "Watching us both, I think."

"Yes, I know. But he did not see anything. I was prepared. I know he is playing the spy."

"What a dreadful thing! What can have given rise to suspicion in his mind?" went on Mrs. Mayne, with agitation. "Mary, you must turn his doubts away. You can if you will."

"How?" asked the girl, coldly.

"He is very impressionable; and you might make him so much attached to you, that ——"

"That I might lay his doubts to rest against his will? And what of Elspeth?"

"Oh dear, I don't mean in *that* way—that he should fall in love with you," bewailed poor Mrs. Mayne. "You will not understand."

"I understand only too well, mamma. It is you, I fear, who do not. Godfrey is not what you think him; cold and passionless. He will love with the most impassioned ardour, once his love is awakened: and, rely upon it, it has not been by that silly child, Elspeth. No, no; I should dread awaking *that* in him more than anything. Let the worst come, rather than that. Why, mamma," resumed the girl, her voice trembling with emotion, "remember what reason I have to dread the very word love: and then ask me, if you dare, to excite it again, and of my own free will; you know I would rather die."

"Then Godfrey will find out everything," said Mrs. Mayne. "We shall be cast out on the world again, and the peace I thought I had found at last will be over."

"Do you call this peace! This eternal dread of discovery; this trembling at every knock; this shrinking away from chance visitors? Why, it is worse, a thousand times, than our restless wandering about was. Poor dear mamma, poor dear, gentle mamma," she moaned, with a sudden burst of tenderness, as she put her arms round her mother's neck. "I am so sorry for you—tortured by this new fear when you thought you were at last resting. It would almost be better to confess; to—to—tell everything."

Her mother pushed her violently away, shuddering from head to foot. "Are you mad, Mary? Oh, not for the world. Oh, promise that you will not, for it would be madness. Promise, promise!"

"I promise," said the girl, bitterly. "With my whole life ruined, a few more useless falsehoods, a few more acted deceptions cannot matter much."

"How hard, how cruel you are!" sobbed Mrs. Mayne.

The girl looked at her with a searching, pathetic expression, the

meaning of which her mother could not read. For it told of hopeless inability of the better nature to get even sympathy for its far heavier burden from the other one. Hard!

"I am sorry if I seem harsh," said she gently. "And I will try, mamma, in some harmless way, to dispel Godfrey's doubts."

The following day an invitation came for a dinner at Goule Park: for Mr. and Mrs. Mayne, Mr. Godfrey Mayne, and Miss Dixon. Mrs. Mayne turned the note about in her hand and cast a nervous glance at her daughter.

"I am glad," said Mary, lightly. "I like Lady Hunt. Shall we all go, Mr. Mayne?"

"Why, of course," he answered.

"Very solemn feasts, those Goule banquets are," remarked Godfrey. "Parsons to right of you, parsons to left of you, and the game never properly hung. I hope you will find in it the pleasure you anticipate, Miss Dixon."

"I hope I shall. I am longing to see Sir Thomas and the Lady Jane together."

So the invitation to the Park was accepted.

In the meantime, Godfrey began putting in practice his theory of getting used to the charms of the dangerous Miss Dixon, in order that he might lay hold of some clue to the mystery concerning her past life. As if to further his scheme, the unconscious defendant met him half way.

On this day, the day that the invitation had come for the dinner-party, she asked him, rather hesitatingly, if he would mind changing a book for her at Cheston, when she heard him say, in his new character of dashing whip and daring rider, that he was about to drive thither.

"With pleasure," he replied. "What shall I get you?"

"I don't quite know. Anything that looks nice."

"And am I to judge by the cover, or the title, or ——?"

"Oh, yes, any of your usual modes of judging of a book's value."

"Then I think I will not get one at all. But if you and Mrs. Mayne will trust to my driving—you know Ernest admits that I am careful—I will take you both to Cheston and you can choose for yourself."

Mrs. Mayne did not refuse. They started in the waggonette that afternoon, Mary Dixon sitting in front by Godfrey's side. She was in a malicious humour, and piqued him by pretending to be very nervous about his driving, while she let him see by the twinkle in her soft bright eyes and the twitching of her mouth, that it was mischief and not fear that moved her. He hardly knew whether to laugh or to be really annoyed, until she said gravely:

"You had better let me take the reins now; there's something coming."

This was too much and he drew himself up. Yet it was a remark he would have laughed at from other people.

"I think, if you really could not trust to my keeping clear of a straw-waggon, it was rather unwise of you to come at all, Miss Dixon."

"I think it was," said she at once. "When we come back I'll sit inside, and then I can get under the seat and shut my eyes when I see the smash coming."

He was obliged to laugh, though he was still much more annoyed than amused, and he spoke rather stiffly for the rest of the drive into Cheston. However, when for the return, Miss Dixon attempted to get in behind with her mother, he very naturally protested; and handed her to her old place by his side.

"That was very unkind of you," said he, when they had started.

"Well, I thought if we went on at the rate we were going, you and I should hardly be content with mere abuse by the end of the journey."

"I beg your pardon; I am sorry to have been rude. But one doesn't like to be thought quite a muff."

"And my tongue ran away with me altogether: as it generally does if I let my conversation go beyond the quakers' 'Yea, yea,' and 'Nay, nay.' However, I can make amends now:" and she pursed up her mouth as if for prolonged silence.

"Look here," cried he: "I will overlook the past and allow you to speak fluently, on condition that you say nothing but nice things all the way back."

"Thank you. I was longing for an opportunity of complimenting you on your excellent dri——"

"That will do, Miss Dixon. Keep to generalities."

But there was a suspicion of malice in a good many more of the remarks she made before they reached the Abbey.

Godfrey did not know, as he thought the matter over on his return, whether he had enjoyed that drive or not.

On the following afternoon, Godfrey was in his own room, when he saw Sir William Hunt ride up, leave his horse with the groom, and approach the front door. Knowing that his father was out, Godfrey at once went down. At the head of the staircase he met his step-mother gliding noiselessly up. She was looking white and scared.

"Are you not well?" asked Godfrey.

"The most dreadful headache came on after my hearty lunch," she murmured, "and I—I think visitors are coming in: I heard the bell. Colonel Underwood, I dare say—and I'm sure I can't talk to him—and Mary's gone to the Vicarage, and all. It is very tiresome."

"It is Sir William Hunt," replied Godfrey.

"Oh dear, what a pity!—and I have not seen him yet. You must be good enough to receive him, Godfrey. Don't—*please* don't say I am at home. Let him think I am out driving, or walking, or—or anything."

Godfrey went down. But the conviction lay upon him that it was Sir William Hunt who had startled his step-mother and taken the

colour from her plump cheeks, not the hearty lunch. And he marvelled greatly what Sir William had done in the past to Mrs. and Miss Dixon, or what they had done to him.

Some days went on. Godfrey pursued the task he had set himself—that of studying Mary Dixon. And little by little it came about that in the active use of the means the end was lost sight of; and though Godfrey was methodical enough to ask himself each evening what progress his investigations had made, he was never able to say that he had made very important discoveries—from the detective's point of view. He had indeed found out that novels with a strong dash of romance in them shared her affection with the works of Thackeray and George Eliot; that Tennyson was her favourite poet, and that she knew pages of his poems by heart; that she confessed that her besetting sin was love of dress; that she knew more about the standard literature of France, Germany and Italy than he did about that of his native land; that she could play billiards and didn't care for lawn-tennis; that her eyes were quite a different colour on a sunny day from what they were when the sky was clouded; that she had all the little capricious pretty woman's wants that he was delighted to satisfy, and that his theory, of resisting the effect of her charms by studying and getting used to them, was all wrong.

It was so easy to talk to her; he had fallen so naturally into the habit of small attentions such as he had been used in her lifetime to pay to his mother; never to anyone else until now. And it was not until one day when the accidental touch of her hand, as they both tried to catch a ball of wool that was rolling off her lap, seemed to strike in a moment his very soul into fire, that he woke to his danger. He started up without daring to look at her, and walked to the farthest window. Miss Dixon glanced up from her work in surprise; and he had restored the ball so clumsily that it rolled back again half-way across the room.

"What is the matter, Mr. Godfrey? Neuralgia again?"

"No. At least, yes; yes, I think it is," he said, as he went out by the French window into the garden.

She laughed. Neuralgia is a very painful thing, but it need not make people behave as if they were out of their wits. The truth never occurred to her. During the last ten days, in which she had intentionally seen more of him, her fear of a possibly passionate Godfrey had been entirely lost in a new and careless liking for the cool and attentive Godfrey.

It is difficult to imagine smouldering fire, heroic devotion, or any attributes of that sort in a harmless gentleman who takes a simple pleasure in sorting one's filosele or in choosing one a good pen. These actions may indeed be made loverlike; but Godfrey seemed so evidently to like trifling for trifling's sake, that she laughed at him and never thought Elspeth need be jealous. He complained one day that Elspeth did not provide him with these little employments.

"Of course not," said Mary. "She wants you to go out to win a fortune for her, not to pick up her pins."

She congratulated herself upon having conciliated him just enough, and the suspicions, which she had indeed lulled to rest, she hoped she had killed.

But on this afternoon when his security had been suddenly destroyed, Godfrey shut himself into his room in a fever. He could not blind himself now, as he lay wrestling with his mad longing to feel her arms about his neck, her head against his breast. He knew that he loved her. He thought she was the only woman he ever, under any circumstances, could have loved with the intensity of the passion which burnt within him. Oh, if he could only have known her before he bound himself to Elspeth! What a weak man he had been to let himself be driven into that; or to imagine for a moment that the feeling he had for her pretty little doll's face was love! And now what was he to do?

The answer to this question came in the sound of the dinner-bell. He was very quiet that evening; neuralgia was an excuse for that.

Mary was sorry for him; he looked haggard and ill. He had been so kind lately; she had got used to him as a companion through the evenings, which would have been dull but for trifling wrangles with him on all subjects within their ken or without it, from Schopenhauer's philosophy to the right way of threading a wool-needle. But on this evening Godfrey went out into the garden as soon as dinner was over and wandered about by himself. Presently he heard a light step behind him and Mary Dixon held out his hat.

"You are silly to come out without your hat when you have neuralgia," she said severely. "You will have it worse than ever to-night."

"I dare say I shall," replied he. "But it is very kind of you to think of it."

"Why, so it is; but perhaps I shouldn't have thought of it quite so quickly had it not been that they are playing at cribbage indoors and not taking the slightest notice of me. I've come out in search of sympathy and attention."

But he could not answer in their usual style of badinage; her light words stirred a deeper feeling within him now. However, she put it all down to neuralgia; and they walked about together and watched the swallows flying. Even this harmless amusement woke mournful thoughts in Godfrey.

"We have not had half as many swallows' nests as usual about the place this year," he remarked in a tone of complaint.

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, don't you know the old superstition—that one must not expect any good luck or happiness if the swallows go away?"

"Do they say that?" she asked in a low voice. "Then, mamma

and I—but it is only a silly superstition,” she broke off quickly. “You don’t believe in it, do you?”

“I’m not sure. We are all superstitious in Lancashire. There are stories about every stone and every tree. All the wells were holy once, and all the old houses are haunted.”

“The Abbey is not haunted.”

“No, not exactly; but there’s a story about it.”

“Go on. What is it?”

“Well, tradition says that a monk was bricked up in the wall of his cell once; and that bit of the wall is still standing. It is said that if anyone who has committed a crime stands looking at that wall by himself for half an hour in the twilight, he sees the dead monk, and, in spite of all his efforts, cannot help uttering a scream.”

“What a silly story,” she exclaimed. “Why, if anyone were to stare by himself at dusk at any wall, after being told that, of course he would scream if he were superstitious to begin with.”

“Of course. That’s the point of the story. And it wouldn’t matter whether he was superstitious or not.”

“Oh yes, it would. Terror is the result of nervousness, or ignorance, and the scream would prove the weakness of his mind, not the wickedness of his life.”

“That is all very well; but if you or I, who are not particularly ignorant or superstitious, were made to stand staring at that wall under those conditions, we should feel jolly uncomfortable, and it would only need some clever trick to make us shriek like demons.”

“Oh, what nonsense! Why, you would be prepared for a trick. I could sleep in the room without its having the least effect upon me. I will, too,” said she, with spirit.

“Only it doesn’t happen to be a bed-room, and it doesn’t happen to be in our house at all. It is the inner wall of the Wildings’ best sitting-room.”

“Well, it is twilight now. I’ll get Nancy to let me in, and she shall stand outside with you and see that you don’t play me any tricks.”

“All right,” he agreed: and they started off through the plantation, round to the farmhouse, in some small excitement. Mary evidently got rather nervous as they came up to the door; not indeed with superstitious terror, but at the request they were going to make.

“Will they like it, Mr. Godfrey?” she asked in a low voice.

“Nancy won’t mind,” he answered: “but we must not let it get to Mrs. Wilding’s ears. She generally has a lodger in the summer, one is there now, I believe, and it wouldn’t do for it to be said that her house was haunted. So I hope to goodness you won’t scream.”

Mary laughed. “Why do they take a lodger?”

“Well, they are not particularly rich—it is only in summer they do it. It is an artist who is with them now, I hear. I’ve not seen him: he came only a few days ago.”

Nancy opened the door to them and entered with glee into the fun, which they imparted to her in a whisper. She was at home alone, she said; even the maid-servant was gone out on an errand.

"It's all right; you can come in, Miss Dixon," said she good-humouredly. "We did a deal of screaming in that room when we were children: but I think the wicked monk was generally *you*, Master Godfrey; good substantial thumps you gave us all too, for a ghost's. How poor Master Charlie used to enjoy it!—though he got his share of the thumps as well as we."

"How is it you are at home by yourself, Nancy?" asked Godfrey.

"My father and mother are at the Cairds' at Cheston this evening: and Dick is out with Mr. Cattermole."

"Cattermole? Who's he?—oh, your artist lodger, I suppose?"

"An artist he calls himself, but he is fonder of his pipe than of his paint-box. He takes up too much of my time with his chaff and his questions about the people and the place. And oh! the things I tell him!" cried Nancy, with twinkling eyes. "He has been writing letters to-day, and he is gone over to Cheston to post them: he never trusts anybody to do that. So the room is quite at your service and the ghost's, Miss Dixon."

They all went in together. It was rather a small room, with a low ceiling and a wide window. It lay in that part of the farm which jutted out from the main building of the Abbey as it stood at present, and was built into a corner of the original walls. In its stiff "gentility," the room formed a cold contrast to the general sitting-room occupied by the family, which was lofty, well lighted, homely and cheerful. It was called the best room, and was rarely used by the Wildings themselves. The mahogany tables were polished to brightness, the horsehair chairs and sofa were substantial, the walls held pictures. The room just now smelt of tobacco; on the centre table lay the open blotting-case, pens and paper which the lodger had been using, and some dirty newspapers crowded the side-tables.

"I'm sure it will be worth something to live in this atmosphere for half an hour!" cried Miss Dixon. "And what am I to get as a reward if I don't scream?"

"Oh, you want that, do you!" laughed Godfrey. "Then the tortures of the rack wouldn't make you cry out. Well, I don't mind promising you a pair of gloves if we hear no sound during the half hour. Now please stand here," he added, placing her at the end of the room with her face turned towards the wall over the small table of carved mahogany on the right-hand side of the fireplace. "And keep your eyes fixed on the centre flower on the wall-paper just above the tea-caddy. It now wants five-and-twenty minutes to nine," said he, looking at his watch. "I shall hear you scream at five minutes past nine exactly."

"I take sixes, Mr. Godfrey, in Swedish kid mousquetaire," she

called out laughingly, as he withdrew with Nancy and shut her in, after throwing open the window as far as he could to let out the smell of tobacco and to hear the scream better, as he told her. They left her standing by the table in the middle of the room, supporting herself on it with one hand.

He and Nancy went into the other room, where the latter began leisurely laying the cloth for supper. Upsetting the cat out of Mrs. Wilding's arm-chair, Godfrey took his seat in it and looked on.

"You won't win your bet from her, Master Godfrey," said she shrewdly, when the supper was laid and the time getting on. "And may-be you don't want to. You will have to give the gloves."

Godfrey started. This young woman's keen eyes saw more than was needful.

"You mind your own business, Nancy," said he, quietly.

He was sitting with his back to the very little light that still came through the windows. The fire was low. Nancy broke up the coals into a blaze, and fixed her eyes searchingly upon her companion. He moved restlessly, got up, walked to the end of the room, and then came back again. She was standing still.

"What did you mean by that?" said he.

"Why, I mean—that lookers-on see most of the game, Master Godfrey: when they see a player going to make a false move, why—what should they do then?"

The fire-light shone upon her kindly, clever face as she bent forward and asked this question with grave, deliberate earnestness.

"Don't ask me any riddles," said Godfrey, sharply. "If you have anything to say, speak out."

"Do you remember how I used to lecture you when you were a lad, Master Godfrey? There was not above a year or two between us, but I was taller and bigger than you were. Well, I suppose I want to lecture still, sir—and I hope you'll hear me. You are forgetting, I fear, that you are promised to the young lady at the Vicarage: but, Master Godfrey, there'll be a reckoning such as you don't dream of, unless you keep true to her."

"Hold your tongue, Nancy. Are you in your senses?"

"Yes; but you are losing yours as fast as a man can. Keep still, sir," she said, as he half sprang out of the chair. "I have a liking for that sweet little lady in there," nodding towards the other room. "I don't think she's happy. But I've a liking for you too, Master Godfrey; and I tell you that her dark eyes may have done more mischief than she can undo in a life-time—and if you let them bewitch you, you may perhaps say good-bye to happiness for the rest of your days."

"You are taking an unwarrantable liberty," said Godfrey, trying to speak carelessly. "I should like to know what has put this nonsense about Miss Dixon ——— What's that?" he broke off, starting to his feet.

"It's only Dick calling to me," replied she; and hastened to the front door in answer to her brother's excited cries.

Godfrey followed, having looked at his watch and found that in two minutes more the half-hour of Mary Dixon's trial would be over. Dick was looking in at the sitting-room window with wide eyes.

"Come away, Dick," said his sister, enforcing her injunction by laying a strong hand upon his shoulder. "Miss Dixon is in there."

"No, she isn't; no, she isn't," said Dick, excitedly. "The monk's got her, the bad monk's got her. I saw it in her face. She seized the table to try to save herself—but when she looked up, I saw it in her face!"

Godfrey heard all this as he stood in the passage with his watch in his hand; the front-door was open, but it was so dark now that he could scarcely see the time. Dick's wild words alarmed him; he thrust his watch back into his pocket and opened the door of the sitting-room.

No one was there. He stepped in quickly and gave a searching glance round the room. Nothing looked disturbed, except that the blotting-book lay on the floor. As he stooped to pick it up, he heard the faintest little gasp behind him. Turning, he raised the deep cover of the table that was underneath the window, and found Mary Dixon crouching under it, with her hands before her face. She seemed to be hiding from some terrific sight.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she gasped, without looking up, as his hand touched her. "I will come; yes, I know I must come! But wait, wait."

"Miss Dixon!" exclaimed Godfrey.

She quivered at the sound of his voice, raised her head, and seized his hand with cold, trembling fingers.

"Oh, thank heaven!" she moaned, clinging to him for protection. "Take me away; take me away!"

Godfrey helped her to come out of her hiding-place. She was frightfully agitated, and seemed to be clenching something tightly in her right hand: but all Godfrey could see was a piece of pink blotting-paper.

"Let us get back to the Abbey!" she gasped.

Godfrey was supporting her from the room when Dick, no longer restrained by Nancy, came up, and flew at Godfrey in a tempest of rage.

"Let her go!" he cried; "what have you done to her? Let her go. You are the devil."

Godfrey pushed Dick off with his disengaged arm; Nancy advanced and seized him. The lad was not very strong, and the touch of his sister's hands always acted upon him as some soothing magic. But he kept muttering threats after Godfrey in an undertone, evidently believing that he had done some harm to Miss Dixon.

Godfrey, bending anxiously over the still trembling girl, led her out into the gathering night. Nancy looked after them with a troubled gaze. Mary, clinging almost convulsively to her protector, was not yet quite mistress of herself, for she kept glancing fearfully right and left in the darkness.

"You see I was frightened, after all," she said, trying to speak lightly, as they passed through the little gate to the plantation. "Just at the last I thought I did see the monk. But I didn't scream. I did not scream, did I?" she added in hesitating enquiry.

"No, you did not scream, and you have won the gloves," said Godfrey in a low voice. His whole heart went out to this fragile, trembling girl who was leaning on his arm and looking up into his face like a questioning child. The hot words which were bubbling up to his lips must have found utterance, if some sounds from the lane behind them had not made her break away from him in terror.

"It is only Mr. Wilding; I know his voice; and some other man—their lodger, most likely," explained Godfrey re-assuringly.

But she was listening with a strained intentness to the voices, which only came faintly through the trees as the speakers passed on. They ceased altogether as the farm-yard gate creaked on its hinges, proving Godfrey to be right. He gently drew her hand through his arm.

"You will not say anything to mamma—*ever?*" she whispered.

"Certainly not," he replied, looking down at her pleading eyes. "We will say nothing at all about our adventure, and you shall retain your character for fearless courage. I would keep a heavier secret than that for you," he whispered tenderly.

Mr. and Mrs. Mayne were still at cribbage. Mary asked Godfrey to say she was tired and had gone to bed. She shook hands with him at the foot of the staircase, softly thanking him for his kindness.

"Try and get a good night's rest, Miss Dixon, that you may be fresh and bright for the dinner-party to-morrow."

"Dinner-party! Oh, yes," said she, with a shiver. "Good-night."

She locked herself into the school-room, glanced to see that the window blinds were drawn down, lit the two candles on the mantel-piece, and then slowly opened her clenched right hand, smoothed out the piece of blotting-paper it contained, and held it up before the looking-glass. She gazed at it fixedly for a few moments, studying the marks upon it; then, apparently coming to some decisive conclusion, she tore the paper to pieces and burnt them one by one in the candle, before passing into her chamber.

But the expression of her sad brown eyes, as she did so, was that of the hare when the cruel hounds are upon her.

(To be continued.)

A DANGEROUS CROSSING.

BY LADY VIRGINIA SANDARS.

IT was a cold, raw afternoon, between four and five o'clock, towards the end of November. A fog was creeping up from the city, and a drizzling, sleety rain, falling at intervals, made walking not only odious, but at times positively dangerous: especially where, in the rapidly advancing darkness and murky atmosphere, crossings had to be encountered.

It was an afternoon to cause the most rabid pleasure-seeker to remain at home; or, if a man, to send him as rapidly as hansom could travel to the selfish luxury of his club. And yet, on such an afternoon, Myra Graham, a young girl of singularly modest and dignified appearance, was to be seen shivering at Hyde Park corner, watching with a nervous, anxious face, a secure opportunity to get safely across to Grosvenor Place. She had on a long waterproof, which scarcely concealed her graceful figure. On her arm was a basket, and with her disengaged hand she strove to shelter herself from the bitter wind with her umbrella.

The girl was marvellously pretty. The cold had certainly reddened the tip of her little nose, but it had also intensified the colour on her cheeks, thereby adding brilliancy to her beautiful hazel eyes. She had thrown back her veil to enable her to see better through the fog and gloom, thus allowing the passers-by to observe her lovely face; but all were too much engaged in their efforts to get out of the fog to pay her any attention.

The early training of misfortune and poverty had combined to make Myra singularly independent and self-reliant. Alone and fearless she walked from one end of London to the other, her vocation obliging her to do so. But oh, these crossings! no length of time or habit could overcome the nervous tremors with which they inspired her. She had now been standing for at least ten minutes unable to make up her mind to move. What this particular crossing cost her, not only in positive terror, but in money, and what represented money to her, time, was only known to herself. On this evening, notwithstanding the wretched weather, she had made a solemn vow to take neither cab nor omnibus; the small sum thus saved was to be devoted to a better purpose.

Poor girl! hers was indeed an act of self-denial. Sometimes the policeman helped her over her difficulties, but in vain she looked round this afternoon; he was not to be seen. There was an unusual throng of vehicles of all sorts passing and repassing, for it was Lord Mayor's day, and this had increased both the traffic and Myra's terrors. Two or three times already she had made a bound forward,

and then a hasty retreat back, as a threatening pole seemed bent on spitting her.

The lamp-post, which marks where Piccadilly ends and Knights-bridge commences, was now lit, and seemed to give her a smile of encouragement. She always regarded it as an oasis in the desert of her difficulties, and longed now to find herself beneath its friendly shelter. In mournful soliloquy she whispered, "Oh, Myra, how silly you are! You can't stand shivering here all night." And once more she craned her graceful neck and peered through the rapidly increasing darkness.

"Ah, there he is!" she exclaimed, joyfully, and almost inaudibly. "Now for it."

She lifted up her long waterproof, put down her umbrella, gave one hasty and terrified glance to the right and left, and then all but sprang across. So rapid and impetuous were her movements, that she not only landed safely under the lamp-post, but into the arms of a tall, and singularly aristocratic young man—no less a person than Lord Wargrave. Staggering back from the collision, he exclaimed:

"Hulloa! young lady, pray restrain your ardour!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon," she answered, meekly, panting for breath. "I took you for the policeman." At which strange reply he burst out laughing.

"May I ask why you favour the police so particularly?" he enquired, good-humouredly. The darkness had as yet prevented him from seeing her face, but turning towards the full glare of the lamp, his gaze fell upon it. He started at the beauty it revealed. She fixed her large eyes gravely upon him, and answered with quiet dignity:

"I am terribly afraid of all crossings, but especially of this one, and in this fog; and sometimes the policeman helps me over." Then more to herself than to him, she added, nervously: "I wonder where he is to-night?"

Her voice was singularly low and sweet; the voice of a lady. The instant Lord Wargrave heard it he recognised her as one, and felt she might deem any offer of aid an impertinence. But her distress was so unmistakable, and she was so wonderfully pretty, he thought he would hazard it. "In his absence will you allow me to supply his place?" he said, with some hesitation, and held out his arm.

Myra was on the point of refusing; but it was late, and this, combined with her fears, overcame her usual reticent prudence. This young man's manner was so respectfully kind, he could mean her no harm. She gazed up at him with a timid glance that touched him deeply, so young and innocent did she look, and so unprotected. He gave her an encouraging smile which decided her, and laying her hand lightly on his outstretched arm, she replied in a low voice:

"Will you be so very good?"

Another moment and they were launched through the sea of lurid

obscurity before them. She clung with such tenacity to his protecting arm, that he had almost to drag her across. Her fears were very real, was his thought as he deposited her in safety at the corner of Grosvenor Place, where, lifting his hat, he bid her good-evening. Thanking him, she hurried away. Now that the danger was over, she felt ashamed of her cowardice, and annoyed that it had impelled her to accept the aid of a stranger. He watched her retreating figure for a moment, thinking how sad it was that one so young and lovely should be out alone on such a night. "Fancy Flo in a similar position!" he mentally ejaculated, as he slowly retraced his steps.

Arriving again at the lamp-post, some sudden change came over the spirit of his mind, for he quickly recrossed, and followed Myra with rapid steps, muttering to himself: "Poor girl! she may get into another difficulty in this confounded fog!"

Had Myra been middle-aged, and plain, it is doubtful whether Lord Wargrave's philanthropy would have carried him out of his way in such weather. Be this as it may, he had certainly decided in his own mind that it would be unworthy of a Christian to allow this young girl to face the further perils of the fog alone; he might be of use to her. And then what innocent appealing eyes she had! It would do him good to look into them again.

So thinking, he soon overtook her, but, unfortunately, any excuse he might have framed in his own mind for following the young girl most provokingly failed him in Grosvenor Place. As is not unusual, the fog was but partial, and the atmosphere in this more favoured region was comparatively clear. However, so sudden an interest had sprung up within him as regarded Myra that he felt constrained to follow her, in hopes that something might occur which would authorise him to again offer her assistance. He had not the most remote idea of annoying her, but his curiosity was aroused by her evident independence, combined with so much beauty and timidity.

Suddenly some mysterious instinct caused Myra to look back. She felt she was being followed. A shade of disappointment more than of anger passed over her face, as she recognised him whom she now thought she had imprudently trusted. She drew down her veil, and hastened her walk, trusting that her manner would sufficiently indicate her wish for solitude. "After all," she thought, "I have gone through it before; but I fancied he was different." And giving him no further thought, she went rather sadly on.

Arriving at those humbler houses which lie between their grander neighbours in Grosvenor Place and Victoria Street, she delayed a moment at a small flower shop, where she looked with longing eyes at the fragrant bunches of violets temptingly displayed in the window. The girl standing at the door held one out to her.

"Not to night, Ellen. I cannot afford it, so don't tempt me. But," she added, stooping down, and smiling, "you do not charge for smelling them."

She buried her face in the violets for an instant, and then passed on into the next shop, a stationer's, where she had a few purchases to make.

Lord Wargrave, still following her, but at a discreet distance, had observed this little episode. As Myra disappeared in the stationer's he made a bound forward, hastily picked up the largest bunch of violets he could find, threw half-a-crown on the counter, and without waiting for change, took his stand outside the stationer's, from whence he could see Myra without being seen. Would he dare offer her these violets? She must be very poor to refuse herself so small a luxury. What a pleasure to give them to her, and see her eyes light up with gratitude. But would they do so? They might, on the contrary, flash with resentment, and he would grieve to offend her.

While he was thus cogitating, Myra reappeared, and Lord Wargrave finding himself face to face with her, on the spur of the moment dropped the violets into her little basket. He had no sooner done so than he repented. She drew back quickly and haughtily, for she had no idea he was still following her.

"Pray accept them," he said, eagerly. "You seem so fond of flowers." Their eyes met, his were deprecating, hers flashed ominously. She took the violets out of her basket, and holding them out to him said, with quiet dignity:

"Had I wanted flowers I had money to buy them with; may I request you to follow me no farther." And almost before she had done speaking, forgetful of her fears, she had crossed the street.

Lord Wargrave remained standing where she had left him, looking uncommonly foolish, violets in hand. His conscience told him that, after all, a young girl having confided herself to him in momentary fear of her life, had given him no right either to follow her or offer her flowers. He had been betrayed by his Quixotic character into an error in judgment which, seeing the annoyance it had given, he bitterly repented. Liberal in politics, he was conservative in the highest degree in all social relations of life. Lord Wargrave had never had the most passing flirtation out of his own sphere. Brought up by a woman whom he both loved and respected, she had inspired him with a courteous respect for all womanhood, and a tender pity for those who, unprotected, have to face daily trial and temptation.

It therefore nettled him considerably that Myra should have so evidently looked upon his offer of the violets as an impertinence. After all, what was it to him if she was run over? "Serve her right," he said, under his breath; "for being so suspicious." But a softer feeling came over him as he thought how much this lovely girl must have encountered in her lonely walks to make her mistrustful. Anyhow, he would give her no further cause to think him intrusive. But one way home was as good as another. He was originally walking for an appetite, not yet obtained. To go round by Westminster would lengthen his walk. It was not a pleasant evening to be out, certainly,

but it was well to harden oneself. And he hated clubs, though the frost which had put a stop to hunting had filled them with his friends.

Having thus decided what to do, he pursued his way on the opposite side to Myra; she could find no fault with that.

And yet she did, for as she walked rapidly on in bitterness of spirit, she cast a hasty glance across the street, and seeing him whom she now considered an enemy, as she thought, still on her track, she sorrowfully wished she was middle-aged or ugly; it would save her a great deal of bother. It was beginning to snow again, and with a shiver, she wrapped her cloak closer round her shapely figure.

Suddenly Myra was arrested by a wretched woman, thinly-clad, with a baby in her arms, and an attenuated atom of humanity clinging to her ragged skirts.

"Lydia, is that you?" exclaimed the girl. "What a night to bring those poor children out! You promised not to do so again——"

"Ah, Miss! what can I do? I dursn't leave them at home. He came home last night worse than ever for the drink, and beat Jim dreadful bad whilst I was away."

Myra's eyes filled with tears of sympathy and compassion. "Poor Lydia! yours is a sad case indeed!" As she spoke she took out her purse, and gave the poor woman a little money. Her heart ached for the terrible poverty she so often encountered in her walks, and nowhere more than in the precincts of Westminster, where vice and poverty are hid out of sight by the grim, palatial mansions of Victoria Street. It was to aid this poor creature that Myra had taken neither cab nor omnibus that day, though she was dead tired.

While engaged with the unfortunate object of her charity, she had forgotten him who had aroused her indignation, but glancing across the street, she observed that he was watching her movements intently. For Lord Wargrave's interest had been renewed in the fair unknown, so scornful, yet so dignified, by seeing her ministering to another's wants, out of what he felt must be a slender purse.

Worried by what she thought impertinent persistence, Myra was seized with a sudden inspiration, and stooping down to the miserable woman, she whispered hurriedly:

"Lydia, you can do me a service. That gentleman," hastily indicating the offender with her eyes, "has been following me for some time; I wish to get home without his discovering where I live. Go and speak to him: he is sure to give you something."

Like most of the London poor, the woman was quick-witted, and also devoted to her kind protectress, and hastened to do her bidding.

Myra, who was close to her own home, waited until she saw her enemy lending an attentive ear to the tale of misery which was being poured into it; then, thinking the moment propitious, she made one of her furious rushes to cross the street. The fog had again thick-

ened, the snow and sleet beat against her face. She was numbed with the bitter cold, and in the yellow darkness the lamps gave a quivering, uncertain light. When but half-way across, a loud shouting startled her into sudden terror. Madly, rapidly, furiously urged on by its gallant men, a fire-engine was tearing round the corner of the very street whither her steps were directed, unheeding in its onward course of all obstacles in its way.

The bewildered and terrified girl rushed back, then forward, then back again, and, finally, paralysed with fear, stood perfectly still in the middle of the road, as though she had been turned to stone. Nearer and nearer came the galloping horses; closer the shouts. Myra never moved. In vain Lord Wargrave and the affrighted Lydia called out to her; another moment, and her young life must have ended, had not Lord Wargrave, just as the horses' heads touched her shoulder, and at imminent risk to his own life, made a leap forward, and literally dragged her from under their feet.

On sped the engine to its mission of succour, while Myra, faint and bewildered, lay in the arms of him whom she had tried so hard to avoid. But she recovered herself quickly; she was not one to give way to hysterical emotion.

Hastily withdrawing from the supporting arm with which the young man had encircled her, and looking him steadily in the face, her large eyes seeming larger from the pallor of her cheeks, she said, in the soft voice with which she had at first addressed him:

"I have to thank you for saving my life, but if I had been killed, my death might have been attributed to you." Then she added with infinite pathos: "Why do you follow me? have you no mother, no sister, to make you, through them, respect other women, who, unprotected, have to make their own lives as best they can?"

The tears were in her eyes, and her voice shook with emotion. Lord Wargrave was infinitely touched by her pathetic address.

"Forgive me," he exclaimed. "And believe me when I say I had not the slightest intention of annoying you. I was actuated by the purest philanthropy; for having witnessed your fears, and aided you once, I thought I might be of use to you again in this horrible fog. And surely you will allow that I have been of some use, and in consideration say you forgive me if, unintentionally, I have seemed rude or disrespectful."

"On one condition I will forgive you," she replied, simply. "Go your way; let me go mine. Believe me, we have nothing in common. I am but a poor worker in this great city. If I may judge by this evening, you are one of the favoured few who have more time at their disposal than occupation. If you are in search of the latter, plunge into those courts and alleys where want and sin reign. You will there find plenty to occupy your idle hours, and your superfluous philanthropy."

She motioned, as she spoke, to a dark, forbidding opening in the

opposite street, down which Lydia, assured of her benefactress's safety, was wending her weary way, her wailing child after her.

Lord Wargrave felt the hidden sarcasm at the end of the young girl's speech, but was more than ever interested in her.

"Will you be my guide?" he eagerly said.

She shook her head.

"You will find plenty to guide you there, if you have the inclination to go. I must bid you good-night; and believe me I am not ungrateful for what you have done for me."

She turned hastily away; he followed her quickly, holding out the violets. "Take these in token that I am quite forgiven," he pleaded.

She hesitated a moment, and then accepted them, with a slight smile and a faint blush. "I will take them," she said. "And I trust to your honour not to follow me."

Another moment, and she had disappeared in the gloom and fog. Even if he had wished to follow, he would now have been at fault, but he had no such desire. She was henceforth sacred to him. "We shall meet again, I am sure," he thought, and hailing a passing cab, desired to be driven home. Appetite or no appetite he had had enough of the fog, but it had left him plenty to think about. On reaching his luxurious mansion, the butler informed him, with reproachful solemnity, that the company had all arrived.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I forgot there was anyone to dinner!"

Lord Wargrave had settled to dine early, and go with a chosen few to the play, of which fact his rencontre with Myra had made him perfectly oblivious. Making a hasty toilette, he descended to the dining-room, having desired his sister not to wait. But his head was so full of the strange girl who had administered him such a downright lecture, that the fair and high-born dame by whom he sat, after a vain effort to engage him in conversation, gave up the attempt in despair, voting him more than usually dull and odd.

In the meanwhile, wet, tired and hungry, Myra reached her humble lodging. The door was opened by a tidy, motherly-looking woman, who exclaimed with joy:

"Oh! my dear young lady, I am so glad to see you safe home. I feared some accident might have happened in this dreadful fog."

She took off the girl's wet waterproof as she spoke. Myra smiled and thanked her, and then wearily mounted to her little room at the top of the house. Here she found a good fire blazing, and tea prepared by the sole real friend she had—the owner of the house where she lodged. In this house her father and mother had both died within a few days of each other, from a malignant fever, caught in the discharge of duty. In dying they had recommended their child to Mrs. Morris's protection, and she had fulfilled the charge committed to her as far as lay in her power.

Myra's father had been curate of an obscure parish in London, and had married a young girl penniless as himself; for the aunt with

whom she lived, a rich, proud woman, and her only relative, had cast her off on her marriage, and steadily refused all communication afterwards. Perhaps had she known the untimely fate of Myra's parents, and the desperate desolation of the lovely girl, she might have been moved to compassion; but Mr. Graham was a gentleman, and proud also; he considered himself quite on a par with Mrs. Lethridge; and when his wife's third letter remained unanswered, he sternly forbade her to write again. Thus she was ignorant even of Myra's existence; who was left to battle alone with this hard world, her only inheritance the bright example and pure teaching of her parents.

Under the auspices of her clergyman, she was enabled to gain a slender subsistence by teaching, chiefly amongst the children of tradespeople. It was a sad life, and terribly lonely, but she was a brave girl. And now, as she flitted about her small room, she was smiling to herself as she thought she had not formed a wrong estimate of the young man to whom she certainly owed her life.

Had Lord Wargrave seen the careful, almost tender manner in which she placed his violets in water, he would have felt much satisfaction. Poor child! she had a passion for flowers: a passion which, from necessity and principle, she seldom indulged. Her own life was hard; few gleams of sunshine ever visited her; but others had still harder lives, fewer gleams of sunshine; and every spare halfpenny she possessed was spent to alleviate the misery of those less happy than herself.

As she ate her solitary evening meal, her eyes constantly wandered to the violets. Suddenly she burst into a merry laugh, making the room re-echo with her mirth. She was wondering where her courage had come from, to enable her to give so fine a gentleman such a downright lecture. How handsome he was, she thought; and though he had certainly saved her life, how little grateful or gracious she had been! Yes, she was glad she had taken the violets, though for a moment she had regretted doing so. They would never meet again, and there was an end of the matter.

So thinking, she cleared away her tea-things, put her violets close to her, and sat down to a diligent study of German. She looked forward to something better than teaching the children of parents who were vulgar and exacting; often insolent. She had been two years at this work, and how weary she was no one knew but herself.

At eleven o'clock the lonely girl, quite tired out, put her books away, and drawing a screen aside, which concealed her little bed, and having prayed for that protection she so sorely needed, she sought her hard-earned repose.

As she laid her lovely head on the pillow, Lord Wargrave was entering the Turf Club. Truly had Myra said: "We have nothing in common." Yet sometimes extremes meet.

II.

SEVERAL months have elapsed, and Lord Wargrave has not again met that lovely girl whose soft voice, and dignified manner have made an indelible impression upon his mind. True, he had left London a few days after his encounter with her, but both before his departure and since his return for the season, he has made diligent search for her in every street of Westminster, even plunging, as his fair mentor had recommended, into its darkest purlieus. But he had discovered no trace of her who has quickened within him this spirit of philanthropy. Myra was apparently lost to him for ever.

It was on one of the hottest days of an exceptionally hot summer, that Lord Wargrave and his sister were sitting in the dining-room of their house in Grosvenor Square. He was slowly eating his breakfast, which she had long finished. Lady Florence had given up the gay world for some years, but she loved to sit, work in hands, by her brother's side and listen to the account of his evening's amusement.

"How did you enjoy your ball last night?" she now asked him, still busily plying her needle.

Her brother replied with a yawn. "I will answer in three words, sister mine: bored, bored, bored!"

"Why are you always bored now?" she demanded, gravely.

"Why? because I am ever doomed to witness the same inane folly, to hear the same jingling music, to listen to the same idiotic remarks, to gaze at the same three everlasting professional beauties, with the same three stupid boobies ever in attendance on them, a host of minor boobies hovering in ill-concealed envy in the distance. Then, night after night, to see the same bevy of undignified married women, capering as though their lives and reputations depended on the number of their partners.—Oh! I am sick of the whole thing."

"Ah! my dear brother, I fear you are growing cynical," observed his sister, with a sigh. "How I wish you would marry."

"Marry," he exclaimed, getting up and walking to the window. "Thank you, Flo! To have the pleasure, after a few months of wedded bliss, of seeing my wife devoted to everybody and everything, except her husband and home."

Having said this with much bitterness, he continued in a more subdued tone: "Do you know, Flo, I have never seen but one woman who gave me any inclination to take upon myself the thralldom of matrimony, and I don't fancy you would care to call that woman sister. And yet—" he hesitated, and again looking out of the window, said reflectively—"I think I must tell you of an adventure I had last winter.—Why, Flo!" he exclaimed, suddenly breaking off in his revelation: "You have not turned Romanist, have you?"

A tall woman, in the garb of a Sister of Mercy, had passed and

rung the visitors' bell. On perceiving Lord Wargrave, she started violently, but her face was completely concealed by her bonnet and long black veil. At her brother's exclamation, his sister looked up.

"Oh! that is the Miss Graham I spoke to you about," she said, quietly. "She comes here to tell me how the mission work goes on, and we have become great friends."

"Well, Flo, if you are great friends, can't you induce her to dress a little more like ordinary people? I never saw such a guy. I hope she is not a wolf in sheep's clothing, striving to convert you to popery."

Lady Florence laughed.

"I don't see how my friend's dress can matter to you," she replied. "And as regards popery, set your mind at rest: Miss Graham is not Ritualistic, or even High Church." Rising as she spoke, she laid her hand lovingly on her brother's shoulder, adding: "Wargrave, I have asked Miss Graham to stay with me at Waltham, while you are in Norway. You have no objection?"

"None in life, dearest; but as you choose her for such close companionship, she is of course a lady, and you know all about her."

"Yes, the clergyman who introduced her to me has known her from childhood. In mind and manner she is a lady, and by birth also, but hers has been a sad life; she needs a little sunshine."

"Then, Flo, you are doing—as you always do—that which is right and kind."

He spoke absently, as if matters did not much concern him, and his sister left the room. He remained at the window, gazing gloomily out. In thought he was calling up the vision of that fair girl, casually met months ago, yet unforgotten, and whom he had given up hope of seeing again. To try and obliterate this mournful foreboding, and having nothing to do, he slowly lit a cigar, saying in sad soliloquy: "Poor girl! I should like her to know I am not the impertinent puppy I fear she believed me to be, though I saved her life. How unlike she was to the conventional young ladies one meets in a ball-room. Ah! if she only knew how she has influenced my life!"

We know that while these mournful regrets were occupying Lord Wargrave's mind, as regarded Miss Graham, she was actually under his roof. She had recognised him at once as she passed the window, and now, breathless and agitated, had reached Lady Florence's sitting-room. As the latter came in she kissed her, saying merrily:

"Now my princess in disguise, off with that horrid bonnet."

To her surprise Myra was trembling and pale, and her agitation increased, as, in a low voice, she asked, hurriedly: "Who was that gentleman at the window?"

"My brother, dear Myra. It is odd you have never met, but I respected your wish never to be introduced, and also of keeping this room private, when you are here. But," she added, with some surprise, "have you met Wargrave before?"

For a moment Myra hesitated, and then with a quiver in her voice

answered : "Yes, once, last winter, but without knowing him. He was very kind to me on that occasion ; indeed, saved my life."

Lady Florence started, then pondered. She trusted the girl implicitly, and as she offered no further explanation she would not force her confidence. The enigma must explain itself. The current of her thoughts was checked for the moment by a servant entering the room, saying someone wished to see her on business. Seeing that Myra looked pale and weary, she placed her tenderly in her arm-chair.

"Rest yourself while I am away," she said ; "you have had a weary walk." And kissing her with almost a mother's love, left the room.

Alone, the young girl allowed her bewildered head to fall back on its luxurious support, and strove to gather her scattered wits together. For months she had been endeavouring to avoid this man under whose roof she now found herself. Often she had been close to him unrecognised, for her dress was a complete disguise. The pulses of her heart had always quickened at these chance encounters, and had bounded with pure delight at meeting him more than once in those haunts of wretchedness, whither she had advised him to wend his steps, and where her vocation as a Sister of Mercy led her daily. For this was the life Myra had undertaken, by advice of her clergyman, who paid her a small stipend. Her lovely face, which had been a torment and hindrance to her in the rich and prosperous parts of the great city, was a help to her amongst the poor and wretched, who, in their sad lives, divested of all colour and beauty, often appreciate what is lovely and graceful.

As the young girl now reclined in pleasant idleness, and thought in whose house she was, she fervently hoped they might never meet. And yet it would be pleasant to exchange a few kind words with him who had saved her life ; she had shown so little gratitude, had been so proud and hard. Should she tell the whole story of her chance meeting to Lady Florence ? Yes, this would be best.

As Myra thus resolved, a gentle feeling of repose stole over her. She was unused to easy chairs, and what with the extreme heat and fatigue, her brain became confused, the breeze from the open window carrying with it the scent of mignonette, and the distant rumble of the carriages, seemed to lull her deadening faculties. Her beautiful head, with its masses of auburn hair, drooped to one side on a supporting cushion, her eyes closed. After one or two efforts to keep herself awake, her slightly-parted lips and regular breathing proved that slumber had taken complete possession of our heroine, oblivious that her destiny was working towards its accomplishment.

For Lord Wargrave, having received a letter which required his sister's advice in answering, was mounting the stairs in haste. He discreetly knocked at the door, without intention of entering : he had no wish to encounter the Guy, as he termed his sister's friend. Receiving no answer, and surprised at the stillness within, he stealthily entered and placing the letter on the table, said in a low voice :

"Empty, I declare. I wonder what she has done with the Guy, for there's her hideous bonnet."

Looking up for the first time, he observed the sleeping girl, and started. Myra's figure was perfect, and in her close-fitting black dress, as she lay in complete repose, it was displayed to the greatest advantage.

Lord Wargrave approached cautiously, and gazed at her in astounded admiration. As he gazed his heart beat faster, a thrill of doubtful hope stole over him. If she would but open her eyes! but no, they were sealed in the profoundest slumber, their long black lashes sweeping her transparent cheeks. The suspense was unbearable, and to end it he purposely upset a small stand of books. Myra started up as though she had been electrified, and opened wide her beautiful eyes. Doubt was at an end; who having once seen those eyes could forget them? For an instant they looked at each other in silence, which was broken by Lord Wargrave saying in a low tone of amazement:

"So you are Miss Graham!"

"I am," she replied, with quivering voice; "but, believe me, until to-day I had no idea you were Lord Wargrave."

"I have the misfortune to be that individual; and I can quite believe," he added, rather bitterly, "that had Miss Graham been aware of that fact nothing would have induced her to enter this house."

Myra was about to speak, but he continued, rapidly:

"I know I stand but low in your estimation; notwithstanding, I rejoice to hear you are my sister's friend, and that you will shortly be a guest in my house during my absence in Norway. You need be under no apprehension of being disturbed by my unwelcome presence." He bowed, and turned to leave the room, but was arrested by Myra's sweet voice.

"You are indeed mistaken," she cried. "Oh, Lord Wargrave," clasping her hands, "if I could only convey to your mind how often I have reproached myself for having shown so little gratitude to one who risked his life to save mine! But believe me, when, unknown to you, we have crossed each other's path, I have often longed to stay your footsteps, and tell you that there is scarcely a night I have not remembered you in my prayers. So you see, I am not so ungrateful as I perhaps appeared."

Lord Wargrave approached her eagerly. His ardour had been considerably cooled by her quiet reception of his undisguised pleasure at meeting her again; now a radiant smile lit up his face as he said:

"If at so sacred a moment you could have given me a thought, however low your estimation of me may have been, it must have undergone some softening change, and I may hope you will accord me a little of that confidence and friendship which my sister enjoys."

"My friendship can be of little value to anyone," replied poor

Myra, humbly, "but I owe much to your sister. She has made life, that was to me unspeakably dark and lonely, almost bright and happy."

At this juncture the door opened, and Lady Florence re-entered the room. A slight shade of suspicion passed over her face, but it quickly cleared away as her brother said frankly and joyously :

"Florence, Miss Graham and I have discovered we are old acquaintances. You shall have a version of how and when we met from both of us." And, his face beaming with delight, he left the room. Slowly descending the stairs, he whispered to himself, "Found at last, and to be lost no more. But how am I to get out of that confounded trip to Norway?"

Ten days have elapsed, and Lord Wargrave, chafing in spirit, is still in London, dragging out the last week of the expiring season. He has not yet solved the problem, how to get out of the confounded trip to Norway. London, always hot and stuffy at the end of July, is unusually so this year ; and as he creeps slowly up Piccadilly, under the fierce blaze of a scorching sun, he thinks what enchantment it would be to be lying in a punt in the cool shade of the back waters, with Myra by his side. What folly to make a precarious journey to Norway in search of salmon, when gudgeon are to be found in the Thames ! Can he find no excuse for throwing over the friend with whom he is engaged for this fishing excursion. If that uncle of Mordaunt's would only die ; he has been so long about it.

As this very charitable thought found birth in his mind, a friendly tap on the shoulder caused him to turn round with a start, and he found himself face to face with Colonel Mordaunt, who, endeavouring to look as solemn as the occasion required, said :

"I was trying to find you, old fellow. I am so sorry but I must give up Norway. My uncle is dead."

"You don't say so," exclaimed Lord Wargrave. "I am so glad." His friend stared at him.

"No, no, not glad—" correcting himself—"but don't humbug, my dear Mordaunt ! Your uncle was a shocking old curmudgeon, and you are his heir ; there was no love lost between you."

"True, very true," sighed Colonel Mordaunt ; "he would have cut me off with a shilling if he could, but as he could not, I have an enormous amount of business to transact. But you will easily find someone to replace me for Norway."

"Norway be hanged," interrupted Wargrave, adding, with enthusiasm : "no one could supply your place, my dear fellow ! I shall give the whole thing up and return at once to Waltham. Enchanting at this time of year ! You must run down and pay us a visit after the funeral."

Colonel Mordaunt, who had no idea he held so high a place in his friend's esteem, was puzzled, but he was accustomed to Wargrave's eccentricities, and too much pre-occupied with his own affairs to care

to solve the puzzle at that moment. At their club the friends parted, the Colonel to write letters, Lord Wargrave to prepare for immediate departure to Waltham. He had just time to catch the last train.

At Waltham, Lady Florence and her young friend were settled. But Florence, fifteen years older than her brother, was practical and far-seeing. Previous to leaving London, she had discovered that Myra's grand-aunt still lived. She had an interview with her, and that stern and proud old lady, who heard for the first time of the girl's existence, softened by age, and touched by the account of her lonely life, promised Myra a home if she chose to apply for it. Florence was satisfied and formed her plan of action.

For Myra, herself, a new world had opened. As she sat in unaccustomed idleness under the fragrant lime-trees, in the glorious evening light, gazing at the silvery Thames winding through its luxuriant valley, the fields ripening to harvest, their golden hue contrasting with the melting blue of the distant perspective, seen for miles from the vantage ground where she was placed, she realised for the first time that there is a poetic side to life, and that the actual fact of existence can be rapture. With her usual unselfishness, she longed that some of her poor friends out of the courts and alleys of Westminster could share her happiness, and unconsciously exclaimed aloud :

"Oh ! if I were but rich."

"What would you do in that case ?" asked a voice, close to her. She started. Lord Wargrave stood before her. "I hope you are quite strong now," he said, calmly. "You seem to appreciate my lovely view, but I hardly thought it would inspire so mercenary a wish as you have just expressed. Or is it that you desire riches simply to enrich others, Miss Graham ?"

Myra, rosy red, took his outstretched hand. "I thought you were in Norway," she said, passing over his question.

"Quite impossible to get there this year," he responded, drily.

She did not ask why, and all further conversation between them was arrested by the appearance of Lady Florence, and there was an expression of vexation on her face, as she observed, "they had better come in, for it was close upon dinner-time."

That evening Myra was silent and grave ; Lord Wargrave talkative and joyous. At an early hour she retired, thinking that brother and sister might wish to be alone. "I am unaccustomed to idleness, and I believe it wearies me," she softly said, as she left the room.

As soon as the door was closed, Florence looked gravely and keenly at her brother.

"Why have you given up your Norway trip ?" she asked. He coloured slightly as he replied :

"The fates were against it, and in favour of my studying your sweet friend's character. Don't look so alarmed, Flo ; I am not in love yet, but deeply interested. As for Miss Graham, I have no reason for thinking that she regards me with anything but indifference, tem-

pered with a small modicum of gratitude. Florence," he continued, with some agitation, "you who know and love this girl must acknowledge that she is the most lovable and interesting creature you have ever seen."

"What I think is not of much consequence, my dear brother. But have you considered what the world will say when they hear you have taken for your wife one whom a chance encounter in the streets has thrown across your path?"

"Bother the world," laconically put in his lordship.

His sister, with a faint smile, continued: "Do not mistake, Wargrave: I like and am deeply interested in Myra; but be guided by me in this matter. If you have really and truly fallen in love with her, and have serious thoughts of making her your wife, you must carry on the study of her character under another roof than your own."

"Where in the name of creation is that roof to be found, Florence; for it strikes me Miss Graham has none," irritably responded her brother

It was now that Lady Florence divulged the existence of Myra's aunt, and the fact that she had promised to receive her. Truth to say, with a romantic feeling hardly to be suspected at her age, almost from the first day she had known Myra, it had flashed across her mind again and again, what a perfect wife this pure and lovely girl, so unspoiled by the world, would make her fastidious and noble-minded brother. And if she had rejected the idea as inconsistent, absurd, improbable, altogether a freak of the imagination, it was only to have it recur to her on the next occasion with greater force than ever. It would come, in spite of herself; and, as it came, it presently grew almost into a hope.

When she had fully unfolded her carefully prepared tactics, to the details of which her brother had lent breathless attention, he started from his chair, and, looking at his sister with comic astonishment, exclaimed: "Florence, you are that one woman in a thousand, whom Solomon, with all his wisdom, failed to find. Most generous of sisters, henceforth, I shall ever be guided by you; but I demand one week, wherein, floating on the glorious old Thames, I may begin that study I have so much at heart."

His sister shook her head. "I mistrust you, Wargrave," but kissing him fondly, she added: "We will sleep over our little plot, and see how morning's light may help us to untie the Gordian knot."

And when that morrow came, the plans so ingeniously made by Lady Florence were frustrated, by finding her young friend seriously ill. On getting out of bed she had fainted.

Poor Myra! It was the beginning of a long and tedious illness. The doctor spoke of nervous exhaustion and overwork; recommended rest, large rooms, generous diet, all to be had where she was, and where it is needless to say she remained. Days grew into weeks, and Miss Graham was still at Waltham, and as, in her slow convalescence,

she lay in her host's terraced garden, he had ample time for the study of her character : a sweet study which fully repaid him.

With what attention he listened to her advice and suggestions, as he unfolded to her his plans for the amelioration of that class among whom her young life had been spent ! Even if she had wished to escape from his never varying care and attentions, how could she, chained as she was by languor and weakness to her sofa ? But did she wish it ? She desired to do so, but alas ! she knew now that she loved him, and trembled.

But the time came when Myra, strong and well, had more complete mastery over her rebelling heart. Her duty lay plainly marked out before her. Summer was rapidly mellowing into autumn ; she must not delay ; nor would she make any excuse to herself for so doing. And one morning, as she and Florence sat together, she expressed, with many thanks for all the kindness which she had received, her determination of returning to work.

With anxious eyes Florence had been watching how the young girl, in whom she took an almost motherly interest, would act when restored to health. The temptation to which she had been exposed by her brother's open admiration and attentions, at a time when she had no means of evading them, she knew had been fierce ; and Florence's heart bounded with unselfish satisfaction at the assurance, given by Myra herself, that she was not mistaken in the estimate she had formed of her character. But if Myra had any hopes that she would negative her resolution of so speedy a departure, she was disappointed. Kissing her lightly on the forehead, Florence simply said :

"Your determination is quite right, dear, but we shall be very sorry to lose you."

That afternoon, sad and restless, Myra stole down to a favourite spot to think in silence and solitude of happy hours passed, to be replaced by toil and loneliness. Her spirit did not shrink from the work that lay before her. She loved the poor. Their sorrows and cares were hers, and in thinking of them, she almost reproached herself (notwithstanding her illness) for all the luxury in which she had been living during the last two months. But still she mourned over the love and beauty of the life she had determined to quit, and felt an acute pang of grief at the careless ease with which Florence had taken the announcement of her departure. Would it be the same with her host ? A few tears stole down her cheeks at such a possibility, and as the sad thought took still deeper possession of her mind, she covered her face with her hands and wept in silent bitterness of spirit.

Unnoticed, Lord Wargrave approached, and, standing beside the weeping girl, watched her in momentary silence. Then, seeing that her tears continued to flow, he said in an agitated voice :

"Why do you weep, Miss Graham ? Can I hope that you are grieved even a little at leaving Waltham ?"

Myra looked up, hastily brushing away her tears ; it was vain to try and conceal them.

"How could I but grieve at leaving those who have been so wonderfully good to me?" she answered, sadly. "I who have known so little of this world's kindness? But (unconsciously she repeated the words spoken to him long ago) I am but a poor worker in this world, and I must fulfil my destiny."

"And how about those crossings which cause you so much terror?" He half smiled as he spoke.

"I must learn to conquer those foolish fears," she replied, firmly.

"But not alone, sweet Myra," he exclaimed. "Let me be your guide over all life's crossings. However they may be fraught with danger—as alas! all life's crossings often are—if you will accept my love and guidance, I will strive to lead you safely over them all. And when that may not be, we will share the danger together."

For a moment she neither spoke nor moved. Then she turned and looked at him, all the long, suppressed love of her heart beaming forth from her eyes. But the only word she uttered was—"Florence?"

"She sent me to you!" he said, rapturously clasping her in his arms.



JOY, LOVE, AND LIFE.

SORROW is long in our life—joy is short!

The greater the joy, the shorter its life,

And peace is fleeting compar'd with strife,

And we love not as we ought:

We love too late,

Or we love too long,

And 'tis weary to wait,

Though love be strong!

Ah! the greatest joy is the soonest past,

The fairest flower first fades i' the sun,

The sweetest song is the soonest done,

And the dearest kiss is the last:

Once joy is ripe,

It runneth to wrack:

One waiting is life,

Then—one looking back!

LENA MILMAN.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.

ONE secret of success in life is to grasp your opportunity. There are who do not see it when it comes, but these form the exception to the rule. Others again, though they see it, for want of



STOCK'S DIXCART HOTEL.

energy or spirit let it pass. It is gone, and it will return for them no more. Or, if it does, it is that they were born under a lucky star, and the tide in their affairs has flowed twice to the flood. They had no right to expect it; and any man presuming upon chance or good luck, will find these fickle goddesses fail him. They come fitfully, silently, without warning, and their stay is generally of the shortest.

When our opportunity for seeing Sark came, we made the most of it. The morning was bright, the sky was clear, and the sea smooth. In less than an hour, we had debated, doubted, decided, arranged with a boatman, packed, breakfasted, left the heavier portion of our luggage (including the Jersey cabbage-stalks), in the custody of our host of Old Government House, made our way to the quay, and at the foot of the statue erected to Prince Albert, found the boatmen in patience waiting our advent.

To get down the steps, into a punt, and find ourselves in the little fishing smack, was the work of a few moments. The sail was set, she slipped her moorings, and we flew out of the harbour. The day was bright, bracing, and exhilarating. The sun was warm and everything sparkled. There was just sufficient breeze to speed us quickly ; to give freshness to the water and to the spray that now and then broke over the bows of the smack. Ripples flashed in the sunlight ; our path was strewn with jewels—and, at this moment, certainly with roses. The little islands of Herm and Jethou were before us, sleeping in the early sunshine. Beyond them Sark, our land of promise, was just sufficiently veiled in mist to look everything that was romantic and interesting.



SARK WITCHES.

We had bargained to land at Herm and Jethou on our way, but by a slight misunderstanding on the part of the boatmen, the arrangement fell through. Perhaps it was as well. Had we landed, the men might possibly have lost the return tide, and not have reached Guernsey again before seven or eight at night. So, if we were not quite clear as to how the confusion arose in the men's minds, we abstained from going closely into details, and let it pass. But we had lost our chance, and it did not occur again. An occasion had to be made, a very different matter from an unsought opportunity. We agreed with the men that they should return for us, and the islands should be explored in going back ; but for reasons hereafter to be seen, they never did return.

So we made way that morning. In full sail we passed Herm and Jethou, free as birds of the air. Does the reader know the sen-

sation? What can equal it? We had thrown off the world. All care and trouble, the shadows that lurk in our paths, the clouds that veil our sunshine, these were deliberately put aside; buried in the depths of the bright blue sea through which we were now skimming. We traced the long wake made by the little skiff—our pathway through the great waters. Guernsey receded; houses and slopes diminished; green hills and waving trees grew faint, invisible; white cliffs and rocks became hazy. Now and then a black guillemot crossed our path, or a strong-winged cormorant, with neck outstretched, looking cruel and greedy, but hastening onward with so straight a course, one felt it belonged to a race of birds full of character and mental decision.

So we passed under the very shadow of Herm, and waited not. Onward, straight as a dart, swift and sure, we made for Sark. We neared it, and revelled in the grandeur of its rocky coast. It was worthy its reputation, and many of the cliffs were almost perpendicular. We traced the outline of Great and Little Sark, and the narrow pathway of the precipitous Coupée, but for which, the one island would become two. By the help of a rope attached to a ring in the cliff, two or three fishermen were descending, scaling the rocky wall like flies: their life, or at least their limbs, depending upon a thread, though no doubt a strong one. The island looked wild and beautiful, as far as it could be seen, from this point; the rocks were noble and majestic, broken and rugged, here high and towering, there sloping to the sea.

The harbour lay on the other side of the island, and to go round would have considerably added to the journey, and certainly have lost the return tide to the men. Moreover, it was far more adventurous to run into a wild little bay, land, as it were, *sub rosa*, take the island by storm, and climb up the rugged rocks to the flat surface, than sail round to a commonplace harbour, and land in orthodox, commonplace manner, with steps built up to make the way easy, a highroad to the inn, and possibly a conveyance in waiting.

And yet I must hasten to add that the harbour of Sark is not commonplace. It is wonderfully small, beautiful and romantic; sheltered by high cliffs, and giving access to the interior only by tunnels in the rocks, unlike anything to be found elsewhere. There is, indeed, nothing commonplace about Sark, of any shape or description, animate or inanimate. It is the embodiment of wild beauty and grandeur; exquisite solitude, perfect, uninterrupted communion with nature. Like a vigorous intellect, it commands your attention; like infinite love, it lays hold upon your heart and reigns there for ever. So we thought it much greater fun, far more interesting and exciting, to run into the little Havre Gosselin. It was a small bay, almost a creek. High, perpendicular rocks rose on each side. A small, rough, pebbly beach on which to land, and after that the upward climb. A rocky, rugged pathway enabled one to do this. Or rather,

there was no real pathway at all, but a series of rocky stones of all shapes and sizes, too often with the points upwards, and a wild tangle of brambles and blackberry bushes, and a chance of falling headlong amongst the thorns. All this, however, was so much slight adventure by the way; the triumph over small difficulties dear to the heart of all true wanderers.

The little fishing-smack ran in as far as was safe, then hauled down her sail and launched her punt. This in due time grated over the bottom, and without the humiliation of a "hoist" from the men, we found ourselves on terra firma. Yet so loose were the stones, and so unsteady our gait, that for some moments an onlooker might have supposed the water of the sea had been turned into spirit, and we had paid undue devotion thereto. This feeling of insecurity quickly disappeared, and with it all unsteady and erratic symptoms, and we prepared for action.

We had landed. The next thing was to rise from the depths of this creek to the high level of the island. The surrounding rocks were grand and gloomy. Small caves suggested subterranean passages leading, perhaps, to another world or to the bosom of this. Great boulders and loose stones lay about, detached portions of the cliffs that had fallen from time to time. There was no sign of human habitation, no sound of life. No "eagle's wing cleft the sky," and the clang of the sea-gull echoed from no hidden recess. But we longed for "mighty pinions," to bear us up that uneven, brambly path, which looked more formidable now than it did from the distance that is said to lend enchantment to the view, and is beyond all doubt deceptive.

There was the luggage also. Only a portmanteau it is true, but as much beyond the powers of one of us at least, as if it had been the hysterical lady's trunk which had nearly drowned us on leaving Jersey. The boatmen were very good; they had only bargained to land us, and might have left us to shift for ourselves, especially as every moment was of tidal importance. But they did not. They apostrophised the fishermen we had seen coming down the flat surface of the cliff with the help of a rope; and it was the first and the last time we heard an uncivil answer in Sark. We were in the depths, but they consigned us to lower depths still—possibly the bosom of the earth already referred to, and suggested by those black openings in the rocks; caverns that seemed to yawn for their prey. The boatmen might lose their tide; we might sit upon our baggage for a week, like a couple of Napoleons gazing at the sea and longing for liberty; finally we might return whence we came, before they would put themselves out for an instant, or help us in our extremity.

So the boatmen with a good grace shouldered luggage and great coats, and commenced to climb. The surly fishermen went off to their smack and their nets, and we could not find it in our hearts to return good for evil, and wish them a full haul.

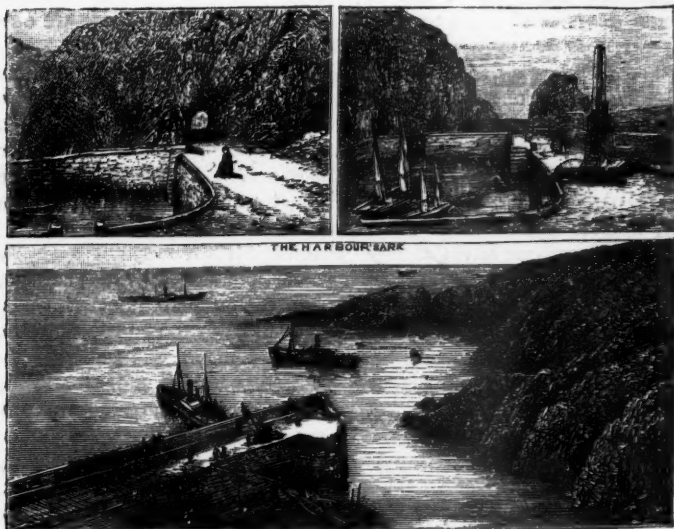
It was a rugged pathway, certainly ; a mere stepping from one stone to another, with occasionally a small rock to be taken with hands as well as feet. But the men thought nothing of it and outstripped us very quickly. Delicious blackberries crossed our path, or we crossed theirs. H., whose taste for blackberries had been cultivated to a passion, went in for minute-halts, and feasted under pretence of taking breathing time. After all, though much more rugged, it was not half so bad as I had once found climbing the mountain of the North Cape, in the middle of a certain July, all for the pleasure of encountering on the dreary table-land that was its crown and glory a wind that cut one in two, and blinding sleet and snow. Never shall I forget the paralysing effect of looking down the perpendicular slope that had to be scaled before our frozen limbs could return to the steamer : never forget stepping upon a long surface of frozen ice and taking a first lesson in tobogganning, which, but for the chief officer of the good ship *Michael Krone*, would undoubtedly have proved a last one also.

No; this was not so bad as that. Everything here was on a smaller scale, and there was neither snow nor east-wind, but warm sunshine and bluest of skies. And all this climbing came to an end, and we found ourselves at last on level ground. We looked back. We can look back sometimes, in life, though we may very seldom retrace our steps. What a privilege that would often be ; how many sighs and tears would remain unborn. Lamentations and mourning and woe were the burden of the prophet's record : is it not too often the experience of life ? But no doubt it helps to form those "stepping-stones of our dead selves," which lead upwards to higher things. Let us hope so at any rate. To suffer in vain, and know it to be in vain, it is that which kills the body and quenches the spirit.

We looked back. We could hardly trace our pathway. The little beach seemed quite far off, the sea gently plashing upon the shore could scarcely be heard. In the distance Guernsey looked dreamy and hazy ; yet further away Jersey was so much shadowy cloudland. Not many yards from where we stood were a few cottages, and a man from one of them agreed to carry our traps to the inn. Pigs, more suggestive of use than romance, ran about his little garden, and grunted us a possible welcome, possibly a protest against this invasion of their sacred dominions. We were not learned in pig language and could not read the interpretation thereof. The boatmen gave us no help. Released, their bargain more than fulfilled, their well-earned pay more than adjusted, they went down the rugged cliff like lamplighters, put off in the punt, and in a few moments were sailing towards Guernsey with a fair tide.

The man at whose mercy we now felt ourselves, was a grim and gaunt, ungainly specimen of mankind. His clothes looked as if he occasionally delighted, like his pigs, to wallow in the mire. He

spoke not a word of English, and his French was the Sark patois which is always wonderful, and frequently, very frequently, obscure. You have to guess at much that is said, and sometimes make extremely awkward blunders. The English, too, of those who "have any" is often peculiar. They change the first letter of some of the words, make hard soft and soft hard, and so vindicate human nature by playing at the rules of contrary. Thus when one day, exploring, we met an old woman trundling a barrow, and asked her whether it was possible to return to the hotel by another way than that we were taking :



CREUX HARBOUR.

"Oh yez, sir," she said: "you may come down the gommon, and go round by that liddle hill, and if you go down to the bottom you will see a stream and a small cote, and then if you must come up the alley, why there you are at Stock's Hotel."

We thanked the old lady as well as we could, but laughter and politeness had a hard fight for victory. She went off with her barrow, and looked back every now and then, wondering, no doubt, whether her description had been sufficiently graphic. It had indeed; every word had told. And the next time she met us, on this occasion without her barrow, she stopped us quite as old acquaintances, and entered into a conversation that, for the sake of the inventors of the next new language, it is to be regretted space forbids the record.

But we are progressing too quickly—a sign of the age. We are

forestalling our matter, or as the French would say, nous mangeons notre blé en herbe : another and very frequent sign of the age. For the moment we have only just landed, and are at the mercy of *Serequois*, whose pastime is evidently to wallow in the mire.

He was very big and strong, and we felt it was only policy to be more than usually civil to him. So we talked, and he talked, and when we arrived at an obscure point of the conversation we changed the subject. We were bound for Stock's Dixcart Hotel, where we were told—with much more truth than is always the case—we should be very comfortable. In this instance, it was twice fortunate, as Stock's Hotel was a sort of Hobson's choice. It was that or none. It is at all times the best, though in the season there are one or two other inns on the island. But the season was now over.

From the very first moment of landing we fell hopelessly in love with Sark. At once we felt at home there ; felt, as it were, that it was part and parcel of ourselves. It was new ground, yet not strange ground. We might have been there often before, either actually or in dreams. I believe the secret of this is that it is one of those small paradises we imagine to exist, but rarely meet with. There are, indeed, very few places like Sark.

As we went our way there was nothing for the moment specially to attract attention. The island presented a generally flat surface, for its small valleys and lanes sloping seaward were out of sight. A distant windmill, the only one on the island, was the most prominent landmark. Our road, white, hard and well made, was bounded by fields and low hedges. Blackberries were again abundant and an enterprising maiden with a jug was gathering a harvest. She was good enough, however, to leave substantial gleanings for other people and other days. She was inquisitive as well as enterprising, for on catching sight of us she stopped her work, stared her utmost, and evidently wondered where we had come from, and what was our pleasure. But she was a very ordinary maiden, and the gifts Nature had bestowed or withheld from her were further disguised by blackberry stains, proving that all she picked did not find its way to the jug. She was poaching as well as preserving. So we passed on, neither satisfying her curiosity nor staring in return.

Soon after this—the only sign of humanity we met on our way—we turned down a lane that in summer must be more than beautiful. Trees met and arched overhead in a wild, rustic manner more captivating than the most artistic culture. But the leaves had thinned, and most of them lay brown and dead upon the earth. To-day the road was dry and the leaves rustled and crackled to the tread, with an exquisite sound which might be called the frou-frou of decaying nature ; but for the rest of our stay the road was muddy and sloppy ; the dead leaves had no beauty in them ; and misty phantoms of fever in the shape of exhalations proved that nature, like all else in this world, possesses a reverse side to the medal.

At the end of this lane we turned to the right, and in a few moments found ourselves at Stock's Hotel. A first impression was certainly disappointing. Everyone draws a mental sketch of unseen people and places. We had imagined the inn perched on a cliff, overlooking the grand sea, within sound of its eternal beat, leading through immense rocks, to the fresh, breezy beach. Instead of this, the inn was placed at the head of a valley, and the view seemed narrow and confined. It proved less so when we grew familiar with it, and the situation has, in reality, much in its favour, overlooks much that is beautiful. But when imagination has prepared the mind for a certain picture, and the opposite is found, even though it be equally attractive, a slight shock is the result.

There was no sign of life about the inn. Evidently guests were not in the habit of coming upon them in the month of October like a thief in the night. The door stood open, and we entered and took possession. We might also have taken possession of the spoons, for not a creature was visible. We knocked and after an amount of time and patience, a dog appeared. He wagged his tail in answer to our looks and questions, and we felt what an immense blessing it would be if, occasionally, men and women were equally silent. A second and louder summons brought forth at the end of a long period a maiden, who was not dumb, though beautifully modest and subdued. We enquired for the landlord.

"If you please, sir," she replied, in the gentlest of tones, and with a trembling which might be the result of fear or age; "if you please, sir, he's up a tree."

Could anything be more startling than this announcement? It was a greater shock, far more alarming, than the Medusa-like reception of the landlady at the Gouffre. There, a little tact and flattery had very quickly raised the siege of resistance. But to be told that your landlord is up a tree seems to imply that for him the end of all things has arrived. *Après cela le deluge.* We really felt alarmed, for there was no going back to Guernsey. The house might be in possession of a hundred myrmidons of the law; here we were, and here we must remain.

"Up what tree?" we enquired, as soon as reason reasserted itself. "If you please, sir," in the same gentle voice, "up an apple tree. He's getting in the apples. He didn't expect you, sir, and will be here as soon as he can get down."

A very different matter, this, and a great relief. And when, before long, the landlord, having released himself from his compromising position, appeared in shirt-sleeves and with a basket of apples on his arm, we felt that the absence of stiffness and ceremony was delicious as it was novel, and welcomed him as a rose in June. He seemed so glad to see us, declared so readily that he would do all in his power to make us comfortable, that we then and there became as old habitués of the place.

For, after all, it is only human to wish to be "comfortable." The very sound of the word possesses a charm; and of all nations, perhaps, the English are the most comfort loving. This arises probably, less from a desire for ease and luxury than from habit; for one of the endeavours of life is to make home restful. And of all people the Englishman best understands the meaning of the word home; is most attached to it; clings to its memory with as deep-rooted a feeling as the Savoyard, and with a far higher sentiment. The one loves his mountains; the other is haunted by the tones, the voices and the footsteps, the pleasures that were shared and the sorrows that were divided, which have all helped to make sacred the recollection. Years pass on; we go out into the world, take part in the



DIXCART BAY.

bustle that never ceases, new loves, new hopes spring up, a thousand interests, ambitions, aims seem to weaken the affections by dividing them into innumerable channels; but at the bottom of the well of memory there lies an inexhaustible spring, colouring the life, influencing thoughts and actions, though it may be unconsciously. It is the remembrance of our early home; of a gentle voice that reigned there and sweetened our days and years; where all was piety and all was peace. In this one matter at least, we are "once a child, always a child." It is the best part of us; we do well to cling to it. Unhappy they who have not this influence and halo to carry with them into the battle of life, as a help against temptation, as an aid against the sorrows that overwhelm, the disappointments that embitter, the deceptions that harden. For the sake of that bygone time, and of the sweet voice and eyes that first taught us the realities of love and

the existence of goodness, we keep firm our early faith, and cling to it as—what it truly and indeed is—a blessed and an immortal heritage.

It took us no time whatever to settle down in our Sark hotel. We felt at home at once, as far as all comfort and the wants of life could realise the word to us. To make it infinitely more pleasant, we had the place entirely to ourselves; and this doubled the value of the landlord's civility and good humour, for he necessarily had to put himself out almost as much for two guests as for twenty. Steamers had ceased to run, excursions were over, he had gone into winter quarters.

This did not mean, with him, a season of leisure and inactivity. He was always at work. Cutting down trees; dismantling green-



LES AUTELETS, SARK.

houses for the pleasure, as it appeared, of building them up again; racking his brains to invent work that did not come to hand. Night and day he seemed ever on the move, a mass of human quicksilver. If one rose in the dark hours to gaze for a moment at the starry sky, and to revel in the fresh breeze that blew in at the wide open windows, there inevitably was the shadow of mine host cast by a brilliant moon, as he wandered restlessly to and fro, surveyed his territory, and no doubt planned and plotted fresh work. Whether, at these unseasonable hours he was ever to be found as we first found him—up a tree—I never knew. If, at six in the morning, one got up to watch the grand effects of sunrise—the day always seems to begin with a vision of heaven and a burst of glory, and the silent, sleeping world looks like paradise, and the mind still calm and untried by the day's ruffles, is attuned thereto—without fail there was our landlord flitting about

with noiseless tread and deep in the mysterious process of turning things upside down and inside out, studying the doctrine of changes, which might, at the same time, be that of chances, so full of experiments did he seem. I quite admired his energy and powers of inventing work. Life to him meant labour; he was the embodiment of perpetual motion. Here we have a type of mind that acts too much upon instinct and impulse, and, doing many things right, is sure also to make mistakes in passing through the world. But one thing is certain, that in catering for us, he made no mistake, unless it was that of furnishing too abundant a table. His wife must have been a professed cook; a thorough "cordon bleu." Everything she sent up was perfectly dressed, and her resources were infinite. I dread to think what might have been the effect upon us of a long sojourn. We were only two, and it was impossible, it would have been the highest ill-breeding, a cruel slight, not to recognise and do full justice to the efforts of this artist. The consequences, I say, might have been terrible. A development of what phrenologists call the organ of gustativeness; a settled hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt; a fearful change from a cadaverous and wiry frame to the miseries of ponderosity and the irritating torments of a sluggish liver. H., who was almost a vegetarian, completely altered his regimen, easing his conscience by daily protests to which I paid no attention, and declaring that his sole reasons were a consideration for the feelings of this unseen genius, and by which I was not in the slightest degree hoodwinked.

I have said that the pleasure of our stay at the inn was much increased by having it entirely to ourselves. We had the run of all the rooms, might lounge and loiter in the passages unmolested, could do exactly as we pleased, come and go as we liked, were free and unrestrained. I chose a bed-room with two windows having different aspects, and had them open night and day, even if a gale were blowing. There was something so delicious about the air of Sark, so reviving, bracing, invigorating, yet with an utter absence of all harshness and severity, that it was impossible to have too much of it. One seemed to breathe life itself into the veins: and surely in Sark people ought never to grow old. They do live to a great age, but I am bound to say they also look it.

The population is about 600; the people are most of them poor, though thrifty; their life is very much exposed to the elements, and their food is of a simple kind. These conditions tend to wrinkle the brow before the time, furrow the cheek, silver the hair, and bend the back. There is every appearance of age and the feeling also, long before three score years and ten are reached. Yet as it is a healthy life, full of healthy influences, so they often reach the four score years of labour and sorrow. The oldest inhabitant, we were told, was even close upon five score, and had others to keep her company in calling up the recollections of nearly a century of time.

But the century has worked less changes and wonders in Sark than in the outer world. Many of the ways and customs then in existence exist still. The very language must be unchanged; it certainly sounds as though it might have adorned the middle ages. Revolutionary inventions have spared Sark. It has not even been built over. The few houses one sees might have been there long before the oldest inhabitant came into existence. I do not say that it is so, but there is nothing in their appearance to make it improbable. It has no telegraph, and so is cut off from immediate communication with the world. The most inveterate lover of the wire must here leave you at peace; you may boldly defy him. The very feeling gives rest unto your body, a sweet calmness takes possession of your mind. Railways, of course, have never even been heard of, the shrill steam whistle, that in some cases, such as the fog horn, is called a syren (surely so first christened by one possessing a grim sense of humour), never startles you. No fine equipages dash along the roads to remind you of the restraints of society and the conventional forms of polite life. All is primitive, with a delicious freedom worth a king's ransom. It cannot be too highly prized. You revel in it, dwell upon it, loudly declare its charm a hundred times a day. The idea of returning again to that restless world with all its claims and all its ruffles, the romance it ought to be, and the reality it is, becomes intolerable.

So primitive is the island that it depends a good deal for its supplies upon the market boat. And the market boat depends upon the weather. It is supposed to go over to Guernsey at least once in seven days; it has been known, and not at all infrequently, to remain weather-bound within the little Creux Harbour of Sark for three weeks. On these, usually winter, occasions, the island for that period of time is cut off from the rest of the world. Though you desire to get away, and though your errand be one of life or death, you must remain in statu quo, and in patience possess your soul.

The market boat is merely a small lugger, no bigger than a fishing smack. It will accommodate about twenty people, but they must sit very close and keep very still. You must pay extra for elbow room. There is no cabin, and if the weather is rough you have no refuge from the stormy winds and waves. The water breaks over the boat, and finds out the weak joints in your armour: runs down your neck and splashes your face, so that you have to untuck to make yourself comfortable again. All this is trying to the temper. You reach your destination cold, wet, and miserable. Life is a burden and mankind odious. The bread and the butter and other necessities of life have escaped all harm except a decided salt sea flavour. And oh! what a consolation to reach the refuge of that little harbour. The seven miles separating Sark from Guernsey have appeared seventy. You feel you would rather face the Bay of Biscay at its worst in a steamer, than this little passage in a market boat.

But these miseries, as a rule, happen in winter. The summer journeys, in fair weather, are everything that is delightful, provided the boat is not overfreighted with passengers and provisions. We were amused at the description of the little maiden who waited upon us at the inn, and won our regard by her quiet ways and willing manners. One stormy day, when she was endeavouring to light an obstinate fire, the following conversation took place.

"Lucinda, are you a native of Sark?"

"Oh no, sir," was the reply, delivered in the tone of a remonstrance. "My people"—it is singular how quickly they catch up the tricks and turns and mannerisms of "society"—"My people belong to Guernsey."

"One of the old Guernsey families, Lucinda?"

"Yes, sir, very old"—cross questions and crooked answers. "Grandmother lived to be nearly a hundred. Grandfather's alive still. He's very troublesome. They say he'll never die."

"Guernsey must be a very healthy spot, Lucinda?"

"Pretty well, sir. But Aunt Félicité says it's aggravation, more than anything else."

This was put obscurely, but the noun was evidently intended to refer to person and not place. Grandfather was living on to spite his relatives.

"Do your people ever come to see you, Lucinda?"

"No, sir; but I go to them, every Christmas, for three weeks." It was quite pleasant to see the glow of anticipation that transformed the little face.

"That must be a very happy time for you?"

"Oh, sir! I couldn't stay in Sark if it weren't for that. Not but what Mr. and Mrs. Stock are as kind as kind can be. But they're not father and mother, sir."

"How do you go over on those occasions?"

"In the market-boat, sir. There's no other way."

"And are you a good sailor?"

"No, sir. I shut my eyes when I get into the boat, and I open them again when I get out of it. And, even then, sometimes I'm very ill."

"Have you ever had a bad passage, Lucinda?"

"Yes, sir. Last Christmas we were seven hours crossing, and were nearly lost. The men gave themselves up. When we got to Guernsey the boat was half full of water, and we were all wet through. I was sitting with my feet in a cold sea bath, and had to be carried on shore, as near frozen as possible."

"You must have been very ill."

"No, sir. I was much too frightened to be ill."

This was a new remedy for mal-de-mer, and gave one an idea. The difficulty would be to obtain the ingredient. Sea air, as advertised, may be supplied in bottles, as well as the human voice

but would it be possible, even in these wonderful days, to accomplish an "Extract of Fear?"

By this time the obstinate fire had burnt up. Lucinda with a pair of bellows that would almost have served a blacksmith's turn, had raised almost as great a tempest within as raged without. The wood crackled, the coal lighted, the sparks flew round; a roaring flame went up the chimney. H. shouted for joy. It was the one subject on which we differed. I delighted in open windows and doors, deep draughts of fresh air, the smell of the salt sea, the close waving and surging of the trees: all this was so much life and health and keen enjoyment. His pleasure, on the contrary, was to close and bolt all windows, shut all doors, cement all cracks, sit in an easy-chair, with nose and knees just an inch from the blazing fire, draw down all blinds at the very first approach of twilight, when the sky is at its best, have lamps brought in, and call the result paradise. And he had no excuse: young, vigorous and active, it was pure indulgence, pampered luxury.



CREUX TERRIBLE.

The tempest alluded to was the normal state of things during nearly the whole of our stay in Sark. Had we not left Guernsey that first morning, we could not have done so any other for a whole week. With one exception, no boat left Sark and none came to it. The sea lashed the little island in fury, a greater protection against an enemy than the strongest forts ever built. We were cut off from the world and revelled in our security. We had intervals of calm, and moments of sunshine; but the skies were generally cloudy; the sea broke and dashed against the cliffs; rain often came down in torrents.

Only at night would the clouds break, and the full moon show herself, large, bright and silvery. Detached portions of clouds would fly with amazing rapidity across the dark sky. Deep, dark shadows, silent, mysterious and to the last degree solemn, swept the moonlit island, chasing each other like the shadows of ghostly armies in a

world unseen. Nothing could be grander than these tempestuous skies ; infinitely finer than the calm skies of repose, when we were able to trace the onward, silent march of the stars and constellations through those boundless realms, which, like eternity itself, are without centre and without circumference.

One of our favourite walks in the island was through Dixcart Valley to Dixcart Bay, from which the hotel takes its name. A very few minutes sufficed for the walk : a continual descent, with the valley or ravine on our left. Dividing the ravine, was a stream ; and here and there a small rustic bridge, or a plank, or a few loose stones enabled you to get to the other side. Watercress grew, and wild tangle occasionally obstructed your path. About the middle of the valley, a roadway opened out at right angles, and a farm-house, grey and gloomy, stood on the slope ; with a garden and a few trees about it, and sundry barns to be filled with plenty. As we passed through the grounds of the inn, we left a goat on the right and cows to the left, our landlord's property. The goat would scramble up the bank, and, perched on a projecting bit of rock, invariably looked down upon us with suspicion and a wicked expression. Goats *have* a wicked expression. With their horns and hoofs, they closely resemble our ideas of a certain personage seldom mentioned in polite circles.

Beyond this we had to jump a gate. The ravine narrowed. The slopes grew high and heathery, and seemed to sweep away to a great expanse. The valley gained in height and grandeur. Paths, not untrodden but very solitary, led upwards to the tops of high and splendid cliffs. On the left, a long stretch of moorland, terminating in an abrupt precipice overlooking the sea, was called by the undignified, romantically misplaced name of the Hog's Back. Just beyond it was the Creux Terrible : terrible indeed, but not to be visited this morning.

Going on to the end of our valley, we came to a short, steep pathway of rock, and in a few moments the pebbly beach of Dixcart Bay was crunching and crumbling beneath our feet. It was a very small bay, and the incoming tide rolled in quickly. The cliffs were high and almost perpendicular. On one side a natural arch opened out, like a giant's leg, and you might pass through it to other rocks and another little beach. The coast stretched away to the left in bold, high, solitary outlines, point beyond point. Everything was on a grand scale, including the sea, that rolled up so quickly with a swishing sound upon the pebbles, casting up a few stray shells, neither curious nor uncommon, and some splendid bits of seaweed.

Sauntering over the Hog's Back, gun in hand, often some way down the cliff and looking as if he had passed beyond the reach of mortal aid, was Philip de Carteret, hunting for rabbits. He afterwards became our guide, and proved an excellent and worthy man. We scrambled

together down the hidden paths of rocks, and he piloted us to unsuspected caves, and gave us many a quaint bit of island lore.

It seems as difficult to begin to sing the praises of Sark, as it was hard to leave the island when that unhappy time came. One's pen should be dipped in sunshine; words should come forth breathing the incense of early morning, the fresh winds of heaven; our page should be made up of sparkling sea, scented moors, rocks and precipices infinitely grand, delicious solitudes, an indescribable charm that Sark alone possesses.

But we are at the end of our space. The winds and the waves are roaring; deep clouds are flying across the heavens; we cannot leave Sark if we would. Here we must rest awhile, in great content, it must be admitted, and endeavour, next month, to get back to Guernsey.



IN THE TWILIGHT.

FAR off? Not far away

Lies that fair land;

Shut from the curious gaze by day,

Hidden, but close at hand:—

Let us seek it who may.

Lie by me and hold me, sweet,

Clasp arms and sink;

There needs no weariness of the feet,

Neither to toil nor think;

Almost the pulse may cease to beat.

Eyes made dim, and breathing low,

Hand locked in hand,

Goodly the visions that come and go,

Glimpses of that land,

Fairer than the eyes can know.

Is it not a land like ours?

Nay, much more fair;

Sweeter flowers than earthly flowers

Shed their fragrance there,

Fade not with the passing hours.

Soft are all the airs that blow,

Breathing of love;

Dreamily soft the vales below,

The skies above,

And all the murmuring streams that flow.

No sorrow is there, no sin,

Nor any snare;

And death cannot enter in,

That comes with care,

But rest that is sweet to win.

There are dreams that were dreamed
long ago,

Unrealised still;

Though the things that the dreamers
foreknow

The years shall fulfil—

The fleet years and slow.

Dreams, memories, hopes that are
bright,

And hearts that are young;

All the stars and the glories of night,

All the glories of song;

In that dear land of delight,

Wilt thou seek that land then, sweet?

Yea, love, with thee;

Fleet, as thy soul's wings are fleet,

Shall our passage be

Soft, on wings of noiseless beat.

Bid my wings with thine expand;

So may we glide

Into the stillness of that land

Lovingly side by side,

Hopefully hand in hand.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

THE GHOST OF "OURS."

IT was with unqualified satisfaction that we of the Royal Manx received the news of the return of our second battalion from India.

It involved, as might happen in those days, our breaking up the depôt at Ballynoggin, Ireland, and joining them at Yarnborough: not a popular garrison town in the eyes of any but of those who, like ourselves, had eaten the bread of exile for two long years in "the most disthressful counthry that ever yet was seen."

We entertained the one landed proprietor of the district at mess for the last time, and bade adieu, more or less tenderly, to the two pretty sisters, the beauties of Ballynoggin, who had flirted so gaily and impartially through the whole set of us that even our false Saxon hearts felt that an offer was due to one of them, at least, from somebody, as a bare return for all the entertainment they had afforded. And a burden of obligation was removed when we heard that after all the youngest and prettiest of the family was to accompany us as the bride of our senior captain.

Finally, one bright December morning we marched away with much pomp through the stagnant puddles of the main street of Ballynoggin, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd of five, with one pair of brogues amongst them.

We arrived at Yarnborough a few days before the regiment, took over the barracks and gave ourselves up to the work of settling down. We achieved the feat in due time. Everyone but the Smylies (the captain and his bride before-mentioned): but as, to the best of my belief, they are not settled down yet, that exception need not be dwelt on.

They were the oddest couple. He was a solemn, slow, soft-spoken, elderly officer; a disappointed man; victim of the neglect of those in high quarters, and general ill-luck as regards promotion. How he came to propose to Miss Lavinia McCran, a long-legged school-girl, still in pinafores, and generally known in the family as "Peter," no one could ever guess. He *did* so, the young lady affirmed (to the no slight disgust of her two elder sisters), while seeing her home from church one wet Sunday, under his umbrella, and he hadn't nerve enough to contradict her even if it had not been the case.

I never knew whether he was the happiest or most wretched of men ever after. He adored his "Lally," and waited on her hand and foot, but her sayings and doings caused him anguish acute enough to have shortened the life of another man.

"Mrs. Smylie's last" gave flavour to many a conversation, and the Smylie ménage was the wonder and admiration of the regiment.

There yet lives in my mind the inauguration of the Smylies' quarters, when in the delight of her heart at getting the rooms she had set her fancy on, Mrs. Smylie asked me and half-a-dozen others to come and have tea with her. I obeyed, finding a carpetless room with a roaring fire, at which two young fellows were toasting crumpets on their sword-points.

Tea was set out on Smylie's tub, in every variety of borrowed crockery, while pretty Mrs. Smylie, in a once-brilliant cambric, crushed and collarless, with her golden hair in a towzled tail, laughed and joked and buttered crumpets in total unconsciousness of anything singular in the arrangements.

To us entered Smylie, polite and disconcerted.

"There's your tea, Smylie, dear," said his wife, "but no crumpets! For your life!"

"Thanks," said Smylie, carrying off his cup to the only perch left him: the end of the big iron fender, in dangerous proximity to the steaming spout of a mighty black kettle, garnished with a twist of newspaper round the handle by way of holder. There he sat, solemnly imbibing, only murmuring gently, "Lally, my *dearest*," in a tone of meek expostulation when the fun grew *very* fast and furious. Mrs. Smylie the while rattled on, keeping us in roars of laughter, till in the middle of one anecdote she stopped short.

"Will you look at him! Smylie! Is it mad you are?"

"My dear! I'm all right, I assure you," faltered he in bewilderment.

"Ateing crumpets! and after what Dr. O'Shane has told you! Well, there, I've done! Ate and be sick!"

But to my ghost.

About a week or ten days after my arrival I was dining at mess and found myself between Smylie and one of the new-comers. I had a youngster's natural curiosity on the subject of my brother officers, who were as yet merely names to me. This my neighbour was a smart little man, a mighty talker; the conversation running chiefly on the changes time had made in the regiment since he and Smylie parted in India some five years ago.

"What became of Vandeleur?" asked Captain Loxdale. "He came home when you did."

"I don't know, and never cared to enquire," replied Smylie, shortly; "dead, I believe."

"He was never the same after—you remember Ormsby's affair? Ah! well I could tell you some queer stories of what happened out in India. He was never the same man after. We heard he had joined a Trappist Brotherhood, or something of the sort."

"Ah—just so. Do you like the new ante-room carpet? Too much red in it, isn't there?" was Smylie's somewhat inconsequent response, but Loxdale persevered.

"I don't believe we've heard the last of that story yet, Smylie.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that we should be sent home *here*—to Yarnborough—to the very place where it all happened—at exactly the same time of the year, too?"

"Yes, yes," broke in Smylie, hurriedly. "Manners has left since then; Graves and O'Connor gone, too; all the old set, in fact, except ourselves and the Colonel. Pity to rake up the story."

Smylie looked so unhappy that I wondered at Loxdale's cruelty or obtuseness in pursuing the subject; but he did so, to my secret joy.

"Poor old Ormsby! He *was* a nice lad. I've seen a few young fellows going the same road since, but none that weigh on my mind as he did. I often wonder, Smylie, if we *could* have interfered to any purpose. His face *haunts* me."

Smylie was silent.

"By Jove!" broke out Loxdale, energetically, after a moment's pause. "It was *to-night*! This night ten years, I mean. We were sitting as we are now—you and I, and Vandeleur between us—when I saw Ormsby's face through that window. Hullo! what's that?"

Loxdale sprang from his seat, so did Smylie, who stood for a moment leaning against my chair, which I felt shake with his nervous trembling. Everyone looked at Loxdale, who resumed his seat quietly, merely observing, "Very absurd! a man passed and looked in, so like a fellow I knew—really startled me for the moment."

There was such a dead silence after this apparently-innocent remark, that I could not help noticing it; also that the Colonel had turned in his chair and was glaring ferociously across the table at us.

"Oh, I dare say," broke in a youthful voice belonging to a funny subaltern, whose presence had added another exasperation to the woes of our exile. "As if we didn't know what to expect when *you* came home! Goes with the regimental plate, doesn't he? Accounts for the smell of sulphur and grave-clothes about, doesn't it? Will anyone pass the Holy Water? I feel faint!"

Then followed a chorus of jesting voices, all in reference evidently to some standard joke of which I was ignorant.

Loxdale took it all very calmly. "I suppose it is all very funny," he said, "but I wish someone would explain the joke. I only saw a man pass the window."

"So did I," I put in, "a young fellow in mufti."

"I saw no one," said Loxdale's other neighbour.

The Colonel sat stolidly scowling through all this. Smylie maintained a dead silence. A few more small jests flashed up here and there, but the fever soon flickered out, quenched by Loxdale's polite imperturbability.

When we rose to leave, Loxdale said, "Just come out here, Smylie, for a few minutes. I want to see if I can find the man who passed just now."

I followed uninvited. The barrack square lay white and empty in the cold moonlight. The space in front of the mess-room windows

was bare and shadowless, and a blaze of gas came through the open door of the orderly-room opposite, through which we could see the orderly-room clerk buttoning himself into his greatcoat before leaving. He turned out his gas and came away as we approached. He had seen nobody. If anybody had been lurking about he must have heard their steps on the gravel. No, he was certain no one had been there.

"He's sharp enough, is Sergeant Druitt, too!" said Loxdale, as we turned away to question the sentry. No results. No one had passed. We looked at one another in bewilderment.

"I saw it most distinctly," I declared. "A young face—light hair, falling in a heavy curl on the forehead—curiously light, luminous eyes—that was all I could make out, except that he wasn't in uniform."

Smylie stopped short with a sort of groan.

"What *does* it mean?" said Loxdale, impatiently. "Laugh if you like, Rivers, but if ever troubled spirit walked this earth it is Harry Ormsby's face that you have seen to-night."

"I *can't* stand it!" Smylie broke in suddenly, in a high-pitched voice, quivering with nervous exasperation. "I'd leave the regiment to-morrow if I were a richer man. I thought we had heard the end of that nonsense years ago! It's *sickening*. Making a laughing-stock of the regiment wherever it goes. They said Vandeleur's brain was giving way, and I don't wonder. *Mine* is."

"What? *You have seen him too?*" asked Loxdale, impressively, his keen little eyes fixed on the other.

"Last night, on our staircase," Smylie began, in a shame-faced, reluctant way. "I could have sworn it was Ormsby. But, for heaven's sake, not a word to my wife," he implored, piteously. "I should *never* hear the end of it."

"None of us ever will hear the end of it, it's my belief," said Loxdale, solemnly. "Do you remember the poor boy's last words to me—that he could not rest quiet in his grave with a disgraced memory?"

"Then why couldn't he stop out of it and clear his memory for himself?" said Smylie, querulously, with some confusion of ideas. "If Lally were to hear of it —"

"She never shall from me; only—I say, what made you choose those rooms? Don't you know they were Vandeleur's when it all happened?"

"Lally *would* have them," groaned poor Smylie, who had been making his way back to his quarters all this time, and then with a hasty adieu he plunged up the dark staircase and disappeared.

This was the story I heard from Loxdale that same night. Not an uncommon one, except in the sequel. A young, thoughtless boy—watched, guarded, kept out of mischief all his life, till he had no more sense of moral responsibility than a kitten, then turned loose

in the Royal Manx with an extravagant allowance and the worldly knowledge of a schoolboy of ten.

"Every regiment has its black sheep, I suppose," said Loxdale, "and a very sooty one ours was. Despard Vandeleur by name; sounds like the hero of a fashionable novel, doesn't it? He was big, showy, handsome in his way, with a sort of air about him that imposed on women—and men who didn't know him; underneath his veneer an utter blackguard. Ormsby naturally took to him, followed him about, quoted him and imitated him to the best of his ability, while Vandeleur alternately patronised and sneered at him covertly. Well! it was no one's business to interfere. He was old enough to look out for himself, and if he liked Vandeleur and the very shady society that he affected, so much the worse. Yet, as I told Smylie to-night, the thought of what that poor boy might have been saved from, if any of us had made it his business, bothers me often enough now."

"What didn't you save him from?" I asked, for Loxdale had fallen a-meditating.

"Grief—utter! The usual thing. A little high play, a little book-making, a little seeing life under Vandeleur's guidance, and a pot of money gone, and nothing to show for it. His old uncle—did I tell you he was heir to a big property close by: Penderell Court? Old Penderell had brought him up—his uncle paid his debts and set him straight with the world once more, and then ——"

"The relapse, of course," I suggested.

"Vandeleur took care of that," sighed Loxdale.

"Old Mr. Penderell came up to the barracks one morning, looking like a ghost. A cheque, bearing his signature, but which had manifestly been tampered with, had been stopped at the London and Yarnborough Bank. It was paid in by a Frenchman, a friend of Vandeleur's, who had received it the night before from Ormsby in payment of his losses at *écarté*. It was the clumsiest of forgeries. No man in his sober senses would have attempted it. £200 had been altered to £2,000, evidently, and the cheque presented at the very time Mr. Penderell, a director, was certain to be at the bank. I never liked the old man. He was sour, Puritanical, unforgiving, and his wrath against Ormsby was something unholy. He came to me first—then sent for Vandeleur and Ormsby.

"The latter came in as coolly as possible, nodded to de Barnac—the Frenchman who had come up with old Penderell—and took the affair very easily. It was a mistake from beginning to end. He had never played with de Barnac, never owed or paid him anything. They had met in Vandeleur's rooms the night before, but that was the beginning and end of the acquaintance. I could see that no one but myself believed him for a moment; I did, and do still.

"Then in came Vandeleur, looking so honestly grieved and ashamed that he almost imposed on me for a moment. Old Penderell produced the cheque. Ormsby looked utterly bewildered and stupefied,

but when de Barnac coolly repeated his statement, and Vandeleur confirmed it, letting old Penderell extract the facts as reluctantly as possible, *then* he sank down, crushed and hopeless. I shall never forget the look he fixed on Vandeleur in his despair.

"The affair had been made too public to hush up, and the Colonel was at his wits' end what to do next, when the poor boy saved him all further trouble. That evening when we were at mess I saw Ormsby's face at the window. He looked in on us all with his great, wild, haggard eyes, and disappeared. It was his farewell. His servant had caught him fooling with his pistols that afternoon and stuck to him like wax, but Ormsby was too quick for him. He made off down the back lanes to the river. You know the Yarn flows pretty deep and strong just below the Market Street Bridge, where there are wharves belonging to some disused factory buildings not far from here.

"Before the man could come up with him he saw Ormsby toss his arms in the air, give a sort of a cry, and go in like a stone. There were no boats about or any means of getting at him, and before the river police could be summoned, the body must have been far out at sea.

"It was perhaps as well. An inquest would have been a nuisance to the family; but still—if he had been decently buried: the service read, you know, and that sort of thing—perhaps we shouldn't have had all these queer stories about now."

Loxdale concluded with a bothered look. I pondered over the little history awhile.

"Then you think it was Vandeleur's doing, or the Frenchman's, with his connivance?"

"I do—most certainly. He had his own reasons for wanting Ormsby out of the way. I don't think he quite expected such an end, though."

"Ah! now I comprehend the case—who was She?" I enquired, with youthful cynicism.

"Miss Barbara Dacre, a distant cousin, also brought up by old Penderell. Their marriage was to reconcile conflicting claims to the property. A majestic young creature, with a creamy skin and a fine auburn mane of her own, who carried her chin in the air and looked at us through her black eyelashes as if no man alive was worth the trouble of lifting an eyelid. Harry always seemed devoted enough, but rather afraid of her and Vandeleur—well, as soon as I saw him look at her, I knew evil was brewing.—He gained nothing after all by Ormsby's death, for she would never set eyes on one of us again; shut herself up and nursed the old man over there at Penderell. I suppose he is dead and gone by this time."

Loxdale's story lasted far into the night, and left a queer, eerie feeling on me that hung about me for days. Of course I didn't believe it: but the face at the window? The eyes haunted me with their haggard, wistful gaze. I became impatient of my own fancies and in

search of distraction went to call on Mrs. Smylie. Lally was at home, looking prim and unhappy, sitting bolt upright beside her fire with a lady visitor opposite. I knew her sentiments respecting callers of her own sex (who, she declared to me, "turned up their cold English noses at her"), and pitied her; also her guest, whom I made out by the dim half-light to be a gracious, stately lady, with great, sad eyes and a sweet mouth.

Mrs. Smylie welcomed my entrance with evident relief, and her company manners slipped from her as a garment.

"So you weren't afraid! I thought none of you'd be venturing up *this* way in the dark." I professed polite incomprehension.

"As if I didn't know all about it! Not from Smylie, he's fit to be tied if you joke him about the ghost. Oh! it's a bad way he's in, the poor man!"

"Didn't the crumpets agree with him?" I asked sympathetically. Her eyes danced for a moment.

"If you'd heard him! Tossin' and groanin' and startin' and swearin' that night! But it wasn't all crumpets." She closed her lips and nodded mysteriously. "He'd seen something," she whispered presently. "And Mrs. Dobbins, my laundress, says there's not a man dare be seen on *this* staircase after dark without good reason."

The lady sat silent during this and the subsequent conversation, and at last rose to take leave. I accompanied her down the badly-lighted staircase and was hazarding some very mild little joke upon its evil reputation, when she suddenly stopped—made a catch at the banister, and but for me would have fallen forward. "Did you slip?" I asked anxiously, but she gave no answer, only grasping my arm nervously, and I saw that her eyes were fixed intensely on something at the foot of the stairs.

"Who was that?" she asked in a hoarse, frightened voice.

"There? No one that I can see," I answered.

"There, standing in that corner. I saw him." She suddenly raised herself and hurried down the steps. "He was watching us from the shadow of the door."

"Did he go out?"

"No. Where *can* he be."

I looked round. The door at the foot of the stairs was open to the barrack-yard. On either side were other doors, closed, leading to officers' rooms. The gas was lighted, but burning badly, and the corner she pointed to was in gloom.

"That's Captain Rawlinson's room on that side. Was it anyone going in there?"

She looked doubtful, so I went to explore. Someone was in the room, certainly, but it was only Captain Rawlinson's servant, depositing a load of boots and newly-brushed clothes. *He* had seen no one, so he said. I mentally referred the panic to Lally's spirited

account of "our ghost," and went back to reassure the lady. She thanked me gravely and seemed lost in meditation.

When we arrived at her carriage, which was waiting at the barrack gates, she suddenly stopped and looking full at me with her beautiful grave eyes, said, "I have been wondering whether I should ask you to do me a great service. I know no one here who can help me, and I want very much to hear the whole story of your ghost from beginning to end, for a special reason which I cannot explain."

"I'll tell you all I know and find out all I can for you," I replied with joyful readiness, wondering at my own good luck. "But when?"

"Will you come and see me some day? I am Miss Dacre, of Penderell Court, and Harry Ormsby was my dearest friend."

I devoted myself enthusiastically to the mission and watched her drive away feeling—well—that after all there was something to be said for Vandeleur. "Think of a man making away with himself, while there was a creature like that in the world to live for!" I remarked to nobody in particular, and to lose no moment in fulfilling her behest, returned at once to the Smylies. Hearing through the door, however, Smylie's voice thundering forth a sort of Commination Service, including laundresses, ghosts and barrack gossip in its clauses, with piteous responses from Lally at intervals, "How would I know it was she? Sure, I'll go ask her pardon to-morrow, poor creature," I thought it discreet to withdraw.

Had Loxdale any more to tell, I wondered. I went to him and told him frankly of my meeting with and promise to Miss Dacre. He looked at me in blank amazement.

"Miss Dacre! Calling on the Smylies! Wanting to rake up all the old scandal again! I'll be shot if I can understand it." However, he searched for and gave me a shabby little note. "She may have *that*, if she likes. It was found on his table when his servant gave the alarm, addressed to me, and another to his uncle." I glanced over it. It was a pitiful little appeal to his only friend left to try and clear his memory when he was dead and gone. Life was too hard for him now. He was going to find a short way out of all his troubles, but he did not know how he should rest in his grave leaving a disgraced name behind him.

"Don't you think it was his use of that expression that set the whole story afloat," I asked; "and then some chance resemblance completed the mystification—some one in the town getting a rise out of you all?"

"Not possible," said Loxdale, decidedly. "Ormsby was a singular-looking boy, with wild, light eyes and hair that he *would* wear longer than he should have done, and Vandeleur was a man who never forgot a face. It was a strange gift he possessed. When he got his company he knew the name and number of every man in it in three days, and once sat at the barrack gate for a wager, and told the name and number of every man who went in and out in the course

of an hour, and was only wrong once. No, *he* was safe to make no mistake; and he got into such a queer state that he dare not be alone for a moment. I felt utterly savage with myself the other night at mess, when I started up and sang out, for, as I did so, I recollected Van doing the very same thing the night before we left for India. He never would sit facing those windows if he could help it. Accidental likeness! Why, he had detectives down from London scouring the place to find anyone likely to indulge in such a hoax—and *they* gave up the business in despair."

I still looked incredulous. Loxdale went on more and more impressively.

"Believe me or not, as you like. It was *killing* Vandeleur. He looked another man when we got to India, and everybody forgot the story. We were sent to Secunderabad in the course of a year or two, and one night he was sitting with me on the steps of the verandah of my bungalow—I don't know what had brought him on that occasion, for we didn't care to see much of one another usually—but there he was. It was moonlight, clear enough to show every leaf on the rose trees in the compound, and still enough, except for the hideous row of the jackals now and then, to hear a tread on the path had there been one. We were both smoking in silence when I heard Ormsby's voice, 'Loxdale, I say, Loxdale!' close behind me, and Vandeleur jumped up and stood all white and shaking. 'There he is!' he said, pointing over my shoulder, but not a creature could I see. Vandeleur couldn't stand it, and sold out soon after."

I thanked Loxdale and departed, puzzled but unconvinced, in search of other ghost seers. As usual, I came across any number of men who knew the man who had seen it; and one ghost story is very like another when details are required. Ormsby's servant had met him at the door of his room "dead and dripping" the very night he was drowned, and had incontinently thrown down a can of hot water and fled. Two other men had seen him, always at night, and under circumstances unfavourable to recognition; half a dozen others had "heard tell of him." Altogether I had but a meagre report to take with me to Miss Dacre.

Penderell Court is a mouldy, melancholy old place, smothered in ivy up to the chimney-pots, and its mistress looked unspeakably forlorn sitting at one end of a dark, panelled room, and a long bare table down the middle, and rows of chairs at each side. She received me very graciously and sweetly. Her companion, a deaf old lady, was sitting knitting in a basket-chair by the window, and, after the first few words of introduction, made no attempt to join in the conversation.

I told my story. Miss Dacre listened sadly, great tears gathering in her eyes when I produced her cousin's last few words. "If he would but have trusted me!" she sighed.

Her attention grew keener and keener as I went on, a pretty pink

flush rose to her cheeks and her breath came fast. "The fellows say Loxdale never used to believe a word of the story," I concluded, "but just now he has gone in for spiritualism, and this seemed an illustration ready made to his hand, so he has taken it up and makes the most of it."

She rose without replying and opened a door into another room, evidently her own special sitting-room, only a shade less dreary than the one we had quitted. The whole house seemed in some inexplicable manner to be in mourning.

"I have something to show you," she said, and I followed. Directly facing me was a full-length portrait of an officer in our uniform. I stopped short involuntarily.

"You know him?" she asked eagerly.

"That's the face that looked in through the mess-room window. I could swear to it!"

"He is alive! I know it! I have felt it all these years." And with a cry of thanksgiving, she sank down sobbing hysterically.

Here a peal of the jangling door-bell went echoing through the house, and the old staghound that lay in the hall gave one big bark. Miss Dacre dried her eyes rapidly at the sound of voices and approaching footsteps and smiled kindly at me.

"I am sure you will not fail me," she began, but I interrupted her.

"I'll find him! Trust to me, Miss Dacre. If he's on earth, I'll run him down and bring him back to you."

She gave me a sweet, thankful look and pressed my hand. "Mrs. Smylie" was announced, and we returned to the other room to find Lally woebegone and penitent. I left her to make her peace with Miss Dacre, and departed brimful of hope and invention.

I soon found myself at the limits of both. For weeks after, I made a rigorous search for all who had been in the regiment in Ormsby's time, with small result. Most were dispersed, discharged or dead, or else knew nothing about him.

Per contra, my questions had stirred up a hornet's nest amongst the officers. The story was revived, discussed, amplified, till I hated the name of Ormsby. We became haunted with a vengeance now. It grew to a gigantic nuisance at last. If the interest could have exhaled itself in "chaff," there would have been an end of it sooner or later, but the Colonel persisted in regarding it as a personal question, and was prepared to resent any remarks of a sportive or derisive nature.

The very core and centre of the whole agitation was little Mrs. Smylie. She had conceived the wildest, most unreasoning attachment to Miss Dacre, and I suppose the attraction was mutual, for the carriage from the Court was thenceforth constantly to be seen at our gates, conveying Lally to or from the object of her devotion. What she did when she got to Penderell, I never could imagine, but she

came home every time brimming over with sympathy and admiration for her new friend.

"It's ateing her heart out with sorrow, she is! How would he rest aisy in his grave, I'd like to know, and she breaking her heart with the shame of his death."

Her vivid Irish imagination was captivated by the romance of the situation, and Smylie might scold, entreat, implore. Talk about the ghost, she would and did, till a greater and more personal cause of excitement absorbed her.

We were all startled by three pieces of news in rapid succession.

"Smylie was going. Had sent in his papers."

"Smylie's old aunt had died, and left him a lot of money."

"Smylie's cousin, a noble lord, who had never taken the slightest notice of him before, was going out as governor of St. Domingo, and taking Smylie as his private secretary."

It was all true, and before we had time to realise it, they were gone.

But we had not heard the last of them or the ghost; far from it.

About a week after they left I received a polite note from Colonel Tremlett, requesting my presence at his house that afternoon.

I found myself in company with half-a-dozen officers, including Loxdale, all as ignorant as myself of the motive of the summons. The Colonel entered, looking solemn and puzzled, holding a mighty envelope, directed, I saw, in Smylie's writing, and, after briefly saying that he hoped for our advice and assistance in a difficult and delicate business, read as follows:

"DEAR COLONEL TREMLETT,—Before leaving England I wish in justice to the memory of a dead brother officer, to put you in possession of some facts respecting him, of which you may make any use that you think proper.

"I must first explain the reasons which have hitherto kept me silent on the subject.

"I was a poor man, entirely dependent on some relations who viewed card-playing and gambling as unpardonable breaches of morality, and to have confessed my intimacy with Captain Vandeleur would have been simply ruin. Also, it was not till after the death of Lieut. Ormsby that I heard that my testimony would have been of any service to him."

I condense the rest. Smylie admitted that he had been in Vandeleur's room with some others on the night in question. Fell asleep on a sofa, awoke to find Ormsby and Vandeleur talking about a cheque which the former had paid. "It's £200—all I can give, you know," he said, "I daren't ask my uncle again to help me. You shall have the rest next month." Smylie thought it odd as Ormsby hadn't been playing, but was too sleepy to say anything; in fact, fell asleep directly. He woke again and

saw Vandeleur and de Barnac busy with writing materials at a table, and he saw the Frenchman hold up a cheque against the light for a moment. They were speaking French; he didn't understand them, and got up and left them. He was too seedy next morning to remember much of what had passed. He supposed Ormsby never noticed his presence at all. All this was spun out by Smylie's explanations and justifications to an inordinate length, but that was the purport.

I asked permission to copy it there and then, and did so, while the others debated what use should be made of it. We separated at last, without quite seeing our way to do anything, except that Colonel Tremlett intended to ride over to Penderell to consult Miss Dacre.

I made up my mind to be beforehand with him, and pocketing the precious document, started at once. I should be in reasonable time for a call, if I made haste. So to economise time I took what I fancied would prove a short cut straight through the back slums of Yarnborough, into a region of factories, warehouses and small water-side dwellings; finding myself at last, sure enough, in a direct line for Penderell, but a mile or so lower down the river than the last bridge.

There was nothing for it but to make my way along the river-side to it, and turning to do so, I caught sight of a broad grey back in uniform great coat just before me. I recognised Sergeant Druitt, and was just on the point of calling to him, when the sight of his companion checked me. I followed them closely. They stopped and parted at the door of a small public house, and after one good look at the stranger's face, I started after Druitt at full speed, and caught him at the next turning.

"Who's that?" I asked, out of breath.

Druitt looked surprised, but answered, innocently enough, "An old friend of mine, sir. Bird, of the Artillery—that is, he has just been discharged. He is going to America in a few days."

"What's he doing here?"

"He's down here saying good-bye to his relations, sir. His uncle, I believe, a very old man, lives close by, and he's staying at the Fisherman's Rest."

"Where did you meet him?" I asked, with less eagerness.

"Well, sir, we first became acquainted on board the troop-ship, going out to India, when I went out with a draft to join the Royal Manx, at Secunderabad."

"Secunderabad!" I gasped, feeling as if I had just "cornered" my man in an exciting game of blindman's buff, and the next thing was to hold him tight and identify him, if he didn't slip through my fingers first.

"What was he doing at the barracks the other night?" I asked, sharply. "I saw him."

Sergeant Druitt looked awkward, then said, deprecatingly :

"He wasn't doing any harm, sir. He'd been in my office for some time and just stepped across to look in at the mess-room window, and then he said Captain Loxdale had seen him and begged me to say nothing ; so I just turned the gas out and left him in my office, when you came up, sir. You see," Druitt continued, confidentially, "I somehow fancied he'd been a swell out of luck and might have known some of you once."

Druitt had hardly finished speaking before I was on my way to the bar of the Fisherman's Rest. An elderly, decent landlady directed me to Mr. Bird's room overhead. I found my way, knocked gently, and entered without ceremony, for I felt that all I had to do must be done at white heat. If I stopped to cool, all was lost.

The occupant of the room was sitting writing, with his back turned to me. He rose and looked round, much amazed, as I entered, looking on closer inspection not nearly so like the face in my mind as I had fancied ; also, which disconcerted me greatly, he was much older than I. I had not realised that ten years had elapsed since Harry Ormsby was a heedless youngster.

However, I said, "Mr. Bird, I believe," and went on to introduce myself ; and, the first plunge over, found myself lying with an ease and fluency that justified the popular comparison.

"I believe you are able to give me news of a very old friend of mine, Mr. Ormsby, of my regiment, the Royal Manx."

He gave me a stare of incredulity, and then a rapid glance at the door. "A friend of *yours*—I—really don't know any such person."

"He disappeared," I went on to say, "but one at least of his friends has never given up the hope of his return, and it is on her behalf I am here to-day."

"I am sorry I cannot assist you," said Bird, briefly, as he turned to his writing with a suggestive movement. "Good-day, sir."

I wasn't going, not a bit of it, if I stayed there arguing the point of his identity all night.

"I have a letter here for him of the greatest importance, and give it to him I must, somehow. A confession and justification."

Bird was turning over his papers with his long, sensitive, lady's fingers : I saw them twitch nervously. If he had maintained his indifferent demeanour I should have been puzzled what to say further, but he turned a little and said over his shoulder : "I have given you your answer, Mr. Rivers. I don't know why you persist in applying to me," and then I saw his large blue eyes wander round and fix themselves hungrily on the big, blue envelope. I marched up to him :

"Read that, and see for yourself," and I opened it out and laid it on the table in front of him.

He did read it, his face turned away from me. I let him get to the last page and then spoke.

"Bird of the Artillery, if you are not Harry Ormsby, or his ghost

what, in the name of all that is iniquitous do you mean by conducting yourself as if you were one or the other? Your conduct is equally indefensible, whichever you are. If you were only the ghost it would be bad enough to haunt your own regiment till you gave it a bad name; but if you are the real living man, and can let the sweetest woman in England fret herself into her grave for your shabby sake ——"

"Stop there! You know nothing about it!" said he, turning sharp upon me. "What an impudent young beggar you are!" he went on, half laughing. "I give up. I must trust myself to you; you are a gentleman, and will respect my secret."

"No, I will *not*," I said, sturdily. "I've promised Miss Dacre to find you and bring you home, and I'd betray any amount of confidence sooner than disappoint her."

"To find me? How did you know I was alive? What business is it of yours?"

I gave him a rapid sketch of her situation, during which, he paced the tiny room uneasily, looking miserably helpless and undecided.

"There's only one thing to be done now," I concluded. "To come away with me to Penderell at once. The longer you delay the worse it will look. Come."

I handed him his hat and he got himself into his coat in a mazy, somnambulistic fashion, and led the way down stairs. I linked my arm in his directly we got outside, and looked about for a cab. None was to be seen, so I walked him briskly along the water-side path to the bridge. We had to cross a disused, shabby little wharf, green and rotting. I felt him wince.

"How were you saved?" I asked, in a casual tone. "We all know how you got in, but why didn't you drown?"

"I couldn't make up my mind to it," he replied, frankly enough. "I went in as resolutely as anybody; but the water was cold and smelt of drainage. Staying in it was not to be thought of, so I swam up to a barge, got put on shore and made my way to my old nurse's. She married a warehouseman, and lived near here. I thought no one need ever know of my performance, and then suddenly recollected the letters I had left in my room, so I bolted up to the barracks forthwith. I found that my things had all been overhauled and the letters taken. Then I came across my servant, who called upon all the saints 'to stand between us,' and ran; so I thought as I was supposed to be dead, to let it rest so, for a few days at least. I did hang about and try to catch Loxdale. If I could have seen him, and talked it over, it would have been all right. Then I found the police were after me. My poor old nurse got in an awful panic, made me lie close and disguise myself with cropped hair and black eyebrows for days; till the regiment left, in fact; and then came the question, what to do next?"

"Wouldn't your uncle have helped you?" I asked, more to keep

the conversation alive than for information. We had got out of the town now and were striding across the dewy pastures in a line for the spire of Penderell Church.

"My uncle! not he. He was only too glad of the excuse for turning me adrift. I mean the excuse for himself to his own conscience. He would have done it before, but for her, *she* stood by me and pulled me through the first mess I got into. I think I hear him now, 'I've Scriptural warrant for what I am doing' (that was signing a big cheque with the Bible opened at the Prodigal Son, ready for the evening's exposition, before him); 'but remember, sir, even your prototype, with all his assurance, *didn't try it on twice.*'"

Ormsby stopped to laugh at the recollection. He had a boyish laugh and a boyish face under all his Indian sunburn. I wanted to hate and despise him, but couldn't somehow, especially when his face fell suddenly and his voice quavered.

"Think of her ever wishing to see me again, believing in me all through! I tell you, Rivers, it was just the thought of her that drove me away. I *knew* she'd stand by me and I couldn't drag her into disgrace; so when the regiment left I just borrowed the railway fare from old nurse, ran up to town and enlisted in the Artillery. It seemed the one thing left to me."

"How have you got out again," I asked naturally enough, "before your time was up?"

"The poor old woman was so miserable at my being a common soldier that she lent me all her savings to purchase my discharge, and that is how I came to be here again, with the regiment. It seems like a fatality! I never calculated on being sent out to India to the same station. As soon as I saw them at Secunderabad all my old troubles seemed to start up again. I could have murdered Vandeleur if I had met him alone, and I felt mad to hear the voice of an old friend again. That was how I came to be hanging about Loxdale's bungalow one night—but when I saw that other man there I made off, I don't know how; I dared not trust myself within reach of him."

Ormsby strode along in savage silence for some moments. The twilight fell, and Penderell Church was looming dark and near: below it, in the valley, twinkled the lights of Penderell Court.

Thinking over his story as I glanced askance at him, I understood somehow, even in that short acquaintance, how he came to fall into trouble so easily and pass through it so lightly.

"Her strong nature will supplement his; his loveable, light-heartedness will put sunshine into her life. They will be happy at last," I mused.

I couldn't feel greatly elated at my achievement. I had done it all for her sake as I should have done any mortal thing she asked me, but it was at a cost to myself that I could not reckon ungrudgingly. We passed through a little wicket gate in the park paling into the

shadow of the pine-wood that surrounded the Court, in silence, out on to the dew-drenched moonlit lawn and across it to the deep ivy-veiled porch.

"Stop!" said Ormsby, as I laid my hand on the bell. "It will be too sudden for her. I had better wait—wait and write to her."

For all answer I gave an echoing peal. The door opened and we stood within the dim, cavernous hall. Opposite to us was the open door of the room where I had parted from her. The fire blazed high, and fall in its light I saw her for the last time, her golden head bending over her book. I drew Ormsby gently forward, let him pass into the room, and closed the door on him and on the romance of my life.

The three extracts following may end my story.

"MY DEAR MR. RIVERS,—You know that Penderell Court is sold and our name effaced from the list of county families, but you must not suppose that so our friendship ends. We leave England next month for Canada, where a new Penderell Court is to arise, to which we hope to welcome you some day. I write to ask you for one more friendly service—to be the one guest at our quiet wedding in London next week—Mr. Ormsby-Dacre and I both feel that there are thanks due to you that we must pay in person. I will leave him to add his entreaties to mine."

"DEAR OLD MAN,—Isn't she an angel of wisdom and goodness! She knew I could never hold up my head with the rest of those stiff, prejudiced old county folks, who would never understand the rights of my story if we proclaimed it from the Market Cross; so she gives up everything to make a fresh start with me in a new country. With a new name, new friends, a new wife, and an old love, if I don't make a new man of myself my name isn't

"Yours very faithfully,

"H. ORMSBY-DACRE."

"MY DEAR MR. RIVERS,—You will have got my dear Smylie's letter by this time, and I'm just dying to hear what you all think of it. I cried for joy when I read it! Didn't he tell it beautifully? and wasn't it noble of him to come forward, after going through so much, keeping the secret all these years?

"To finish the whole thing *properly*, Miss Dacre ought to marry one of you; but, indeed, I don't know a man in the Royal Manx good enough for her, except my own dear husband, and he's out of it.

"In haste, yours sincerely,

"LAVINIA SMYLIE."

"P.S. Let me know if any of you ever see the ghost again."

But we never did.

A PLATONIC ATTACHMENT.

A GARDEN—a garden of flowers. One of the quaintest, sweetest, most old-fashioned ever seen in these degenerate latter days: redolent of moss-roses, lavender, mignonette and gilliflowers; gay to gorgeousness with stately hollyhocks, sunflowers, and huge tree peonies.

It was by mere accident I chanced upon this garden: one of those accidents that come about so simply, yet lead to so much.

I was attracted by the scent of a sweetbriar hedge, protected only by a low paling from the road; then looking across the fence, I espied this lovely wilderness of flowers. I forgot I was wearied with long walking, forgot the sun was setting, and that I had lost my way; forgot everything, except that I must find an entrance to this earthly paradise. A few paces on I did discover it. A rustic gate opened on to a gravel path leading to a low-built house of dull red brick—that mellowed tint so dear to the artistic mind. Straw and matting littered the gravel walk; the flower beds there were trampled with the print of many feet; every window of the house was open wide. A waggon laden with furniture passed out as I entered. A woman standing at the door seemed to be watching the departure of the waggon. She did not notice my approach, and, on observing her more closely, I saw that she was gazing straight out into the sunset, lost in thought.

She was a woman numbering sixty years, but fresh and comely, save that now her face was clouded with sadness.

"Ah me! To think that it is ended now—all ended!"

Something in her look, and the tone in which she said these words impelled me to remain—to speak to her. Laying a hand upon her arm: "You are sad. Can I do anything for you?" I asked, timidly.

She neither started nor showed surprise at being accosted by a stranger. She turned her eyes on me, and I saw they were red with weeping.

"Aye! I'm sad enough. But there's nothing you can do, my honey, thank you, kindly."

"My honey!" It was a north-country expression which I had lately heard for the first time.

"I'm very weary with walking. May I sit down in the porch and rest?" I asked.

"Aye, rest and welcome. Foot-weary? It's a weary world for some people. A world in which everything goes wrong——"

She took my sketching materials from my hand, laying them on a rustic table near, then she turned, went leisurely down the gravel path and closed the gate, returning to the porch. I made room for her

beside me. She sat down ; her hands lay listless on her lap, and her eyes wore a far-away look that told of a world of sadness pent up in their depths.

"What a beautiful garden that is at the side of the house," I observed by way of interesting her. "The late dweller here must have been a passionate lover of flowers."

"You'll be a stranger to these parts?" she asked. I mentioned that I came the previous day to the neighbouring village, and was leaving on the morrow.

"Captain Carey," she said, somewhat abruptly, "lived here for many years—fifteen—I was his housekeeper, until ——"

"Until he changed his residence?"

"He's dead," she said, laconically.

Presently she enquired:

"Which way did you come? By Ashley Wood and over Threpton Common? There you'd pass a stone cross just as you came off the common, with initials on it and a date?"

"Yes."

"They were his initials, and it was there he died."

"I feel strangely interested," I said. "Will you tell me all there is to tell?"

"Yes. Since you seem to mind. How better could I pass the time? It will not take long to tell. Fifteen years ago my dear master came here and engaged me as his housekeeper. He was forty-five years old. He had been in the Royal Navy, and people wondered that a sailor should choose this out-of-the-way inland country place; but when they saw the pleasure he took in his garden, in the cultivation of his flowers and shrubs, they thought they understood. But they were wrong. I found out his secret long before the country people had suspected there was anything particular that drew him to this spot. The attraction was a woman of about his own age, and that woman one of the greatest ladies in the land. Her husband—don't fear; there is nothing in the whole sad history, thank God, that will not bear the light of day. If there were, do you think I would speak of it when *he* was my dear master? The lady's husband—as I was about to say—was Earl of Dayshire—king, as it were, of all this country—she, of course, was countess."

My eyes, following the direction of the speaker's, rested on a castle, distant some two or three miles, which I had seen and made a sketch of in the afternoon.

"Yes," she answered in reply to my unspoken thoughts, "when he was not minding his flowers, or walking or riding on the road that leads to the castle, he sat here where he could see the place she lived in, framed by the porch as though it were a picture. Ten years ago the Countess became a widow, and then I thought—no matter what I thought! Death is the only leveller it seems, not love. The Countess knew everyone to speak to for miles around. She would

not pass a living being on the road, man, woman or child, but she stopped on some pretext to speak. She was not strong; she would drive in her carriage, sometimes getting out to walk, for, say half a mile, along the road. It was at these times she spoke to any passers-by. Sometimes she met my master and lingered talking with him by the paling beside the sweetbriar hedge. Apparently they spoke but of the flowers. At other times, if she passed when he was in the garden, he would touch tenderly with his hand, this flower or that; and she outside the fence would bow her head or smile and say some words heard by him only. This I have seen happen before the earl's death; afterwards——"

She paused. I would not interrupt by word or gesture.

"Afterwards," she continued, "there was a long space of time that she was absent, travelling abroad; but she returned at last to the castle, which, not being the grandest of the late earl's many seats, was to be hers for life. My dear master used often to travel that road in vain. I knew how to read in his face as in a printed book when he had seen the Countess and when not.

"One day—it must have been a year after she became a widow—I heard the sound of a carriage driving slowly along the road. Looking out, I recognised the horses and the liveries of the Countess.

"The master, I knew, was in the garden repairing a bit of fence close to the road. I saw the tall, stately figure of the Countess, clad in widow's weeds, walk slowly past. She paused where my master was busy with the fence. The instant he knew she was there he stood erect, and, raising his hat above his head, held it there during the few minutes that they talked together. The top of his head was quite bald, but it was a noble head, though I do say it. While speaking, the Countess broke off a little slip of sweetbriar, and when she bowed and turned away still held it in her hand. He stood uncovered, watching her till she was out of sight.

"This I believe to have been their first meeting since her widowhood.

"Afterwards they met more frequently. There were certain flowers the Countess had admired, and from time to time my master's groom took roots, and seeds, and cuttings to the castle. Occasionally, too, a basket of choice fruit or hot-house flowers came 'With the Countess of Dayshire's compliments' written on a card attached. As years rolled on the intimacy grew. There never was company at the castle, nor a garden-party, but the master was invited. He had a bright and cheery manner, always ready to do what was wanted or to speak a pleasant word.

"By this time everybody knew of the friendship between the two. They called it a 'platonic attachment,' laughing good-humouredly whenever the name was mentioned of the Countess or the Captain. I ought to have told you, if you have not guessed it, that she was

quite old-fashioned in all her ways—as old-fashioned as my master's flower-garden, so I've heard said. At all events, they seemed to suit each other, these two, and this went on ten years.

"Two months ago—it was in May; I know the day, the date, the hour—the master stood here in the porch. His favourite mare—'the Lady Charlotte' named after the Countess—was at the door, led by the groom. The master was putting on his gloves, humming to himself the while his favourite sea song, 'Poor Tom Bowling.'

"Mrs. Wilton, will you kindly sew a button on this glove?' he asked, seeing me cross the hall.

"Thanks, thanks,' he said, when a minute or two later I returned. 'I could not have gone to see my lady with a buttonless glove!'

"Would she have remarked it, sir?' I asked.

"He smiled, stooped, gathered a lily of the valley, and as he placed it in his button-hole, looked at me with a quick, bright, meaning glance.

"Well, yes, she would,' he answered, and, raising his foot to the stirrup, was into his saddle in a moment, with all the activity of twenty years ago. I watched him ride out of the gate and listened to the last sound of his horse's feet dying away in the far distance. The sun shone, the sky was blue, the birds sang in the branches—the song my master loved echoing in my ears. He had sung it cheerily, cheerily—and yet it was a sad one!

"It seems, as I learned afterwards, the Countess had not been well the day before, and all night felt ill and feverish; for hours she lay awake, and when sleep came it brought a dream—a dream that filled her mind with fear and strange forebodings of some coming trouble.

"Such an impression did the dream make on her that she could not close her eyes without seeming to see it again and again. In the morning she was too ill and exhausted to rise, but, bidding her maid bring writing materials, she sat up in bed and wrote to my dear master in these words:

"DEAR FRIEND,—I knew not that I was superstitious, but last night I had a painful dream concerning you. You remember the picture in the Academy, which, in the opening day, we stood contemplating so long together, and which we both so much admired; the title of it: 'Home they Brought her Warrior Dead!' In my dream I seemed to see that picture, but *the face of the dead warrior was yours*. It has affected me deeply, but my trust is in God that he will watch over you so that my ill dream may be no portent of any evil to you. Tomorrow I hope to be well enough to see you, and in that hope, I am, as ever, yours in all friendship.

CHARLOTTE D.

'P.S. I pray you send a few lines to say if all be well with you?'

"Arrived at the castle, my master was told the Countess was not well enough to see him; but the letter which she had written was given to

him with a message to the effect that he need not read it until he reached home. He put it in his pocket, and, looking up at the castle as he rode out of the courtyard, saw a hand—which he knew well to be that of the Countess—wave a handkerchief from an upper window.

"There is not much more to tell," Mrs. Wilton continued after a slight pause, during which she seemed trying hard to subdue her emotion. "The hours went by, and he returned; but not riding blithely and singing as he went. A boy from the village came running first to tell me there had been an accident, that my master was ill, hurt, dying—I know not what. I ran down to the gate, and saw coming along the road a little crowd. Two men carried between them some hurdles on which a body lay. The face was covered, but when they came quite near, I saw the crushed and faded lily in the coat. I knew the doctor who was walking by the side: 'Dead, quite dead when I found him lying in the road,' he said, and pointed to the mare, who, led by a groom, formed one in the melancholy procession. Her knees bore marks on them as though she had been down. I took the faded flower from my master's breast, and have it now. The face even in death was smiling. God only knows how the fatal accident happened, or whether he had read the letter. It was found in his pocket, and the seal was broken."

"And the Countess?"

"Oh, she was very ill. I believe she felt it keenly. She had the cross put where he fell. But—'noblesse oblige' they say," she added, a little bitterly.

"And—and *you*?"

"I?" she cried, with a sudden start and shiver, "I? Oh, do not think of me. I have lived fifteen years here now. Fifteen! But I have a brother in Australia. I go to him to-morrow. See! There are the lights shining in the castle windows. The Countess is there. One of the gardeners was at the sale to-day and bought some of the best flowers; and a maid came, too, and bought some bits of china for her lady. What! are you going? Oh, I had forgotten! It is nearly dark, and you have a long walk before you. You took the wrong turn. Go back a hundred yards the way you came and you will find yourself on the right road to the village. Your sketch book is here."

While speaking in a rapid and excited manner, she walked with me to the gate and opened it.

"Good-bye, my honey."

A lump rose in my throat; I could not speak, but turning quickly, kissed her on the lips. A moment more, by the low rustic fence, I broke off a twig of sweetbriar as I passed, and kept it to recall the memory of that garden and the story told me in the porch.

E. M. DAVY.



M. ELLEN STAPLES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THEY STOOD TOGETHER AT THE WINDOW.